I. Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life* and Differently Abled Personality

This thesis is about the projection of Helen Keller, despite being physically disabled as a struggling and successful character in *The Story of My Life*, not only represents the voice of the disabled but also constitute an alternative method of thinking about disability as the ability in different sense. During her remarkable life, Keller stood as a powerful example of how determination, hard work, courage and imagination can allow an individual to triumph over adversity. She is a hero for showing the world that severe disability does not mean a life of ignorance and institutionalization. Despite her disabilities she had the courage to face the world and the determination to improve the lives of people with similar disabilities and became a prominent figure in her lifetime, whose accomplishments attracted awe, respect, admiration and inspiration.

Helen Keller was born on June 27, 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama to Captain Arthur Henry Keller, a Confederate army veteran and a newspaper editor, and Kate Adams Keller. By all accounts, she was a normal infant. But at nineteen months Keller suffered an illness-perhaps scarlet fever or meningitis-that left her deaf and blind. Although Keller learned basic household tasks and could communicate some of her desires through a series of signs, she did not learn language the way other children do.

When Keller was six, her mother managed to get in touch with Michael Anagnos, director of the Perkins Institute for the Blind, who agreed to send one of his graduates, Anne Sullivan, to teach Keller. After studying at the Wright- Humason School for the deaf and the Cambridge School for Young Ladies, Keller entered Radcliff College in 1990. In 1902 she began to write the series of articles for the Ladies Home Journal that was published as *The Story of My Life* in 1903. She graduated from Radcliff with high honors in 1904. Brooks, a well-known literary critic, writes:

> With Anne Sullivan she had visited the squalid streets where the underdogs of society lived, the hideous sunless tenements where children grew up, half-clad and underfed, and it outraged her that so many were condemned to a hopeless struggle for existence, a life that was a series of scrimmages, miseries, frustrations. She was aware of the social evils that were often the cause of blindness,-caused themselves so often by poverty and filth,-and she was convinced that the dominant parties were managed by the ruling class for its own privilege and profit. (21)

Keller advocated for increased opportunities for the blind and for improving methods of reducing childhood blindness. Keller joined the Socialist party of Massachusetts in 1909, and supported many progressive-era causes, including birth control, labor unions and the right of women to vote. She also opposed America’s involvement in World War I and contributed money to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

In 1936, Anne Sullivan died. Keller was devastated. The two had been constant companions for nearly fifty years. Still, the dauntless Keller continued writing and lecturing. In 1937 she visited Japan, raising millions for the blind and deaf there, and in 1938 published “Helen Keller’s Journal”, 1936 -1937 to wide acclaim. During World War II, Keller visited wounded soldiers. After the war she toured more than 30 countries, continuing her advocacy for the blind. In1955 she published *Teacher*, her biography of Anne Sullivan, and in 1957 *The Open Door,* a collection of essays. The Times Reviewer in *The New York Times* writes:

> The tedious steps of the process of awakening the intelligence of a human being deprived of all the means of communication with her fellows at an age so early that practically no foundation has been laid by normal means-such is the material of this book on the life of Helen Keller . . . . The scientific interest of the process is great both in itself and for the light it throws on the unconscious and unabsorbed processes by whose children with all their senses learn the same things that have been laboriously acquired by this girl, stricken blind and deaf before she was two years old. (3)

Like many of Keller’s contemporary readers, the Times reviewer was intrigued by the window onto human development that Keller’s story offered. This book exposes the struggle of a disable woman to make herself heard in a world that does not grant her full status as human beings or citizen.

Keller lived a truly optimistic and altruistic life, believing that the only life worth living was one in service to others. This philosophy was reflected in her many articles, essays and poems. For Helen Keller it is extremely important that readers understand her experience and so she often uses figurative or symbolic language to get her point across. In magazine articles she advocated for increased opportunities for the blind and for improving methods of reducing childhood blindness. Clark and John Bellamy Foster in “Helen Keller and the Touch of Nature: An Introduction to Keller’s *The World I Live In*” writes:

> Keller revealed how our senses connect us to nature, providing the foundation for understanding life and the world. . . . [S]he emphasized that knowledge is a construction, based on the interaction of the senses with the physical world. Nature is not devoid of life but is

> vibrant and filled with changes. Thus, life in all its forms is contingent and knowledge is never complete. . . . Keller's perception of changes and natural processes resounds in her words. Keller held that "all of us need to go often into the woods alone and sit in silence at the feet of Nature.". . . . Her senses provided a means to take in the natural world. (14)

When Keller describes her experiences she uses rich, evocative, descriptive and detailed language especially when discussing nature. Many of her later works were largely autobiographical, but there was always an emphasis on the inherent power of the individual to journey through life with hope. Most of her writings are an account of how she experienced the world through touch, taste, and scent.

At the age of 22, Keller published her autobiography *The Story of My Life* . It includes words that Keller wrote and the story of her life up to age 21 and was written during her time in college. Her spiritual autobiography, *My Religion* was published in 1927 and then in 1994 extensively revised and re-issued under the title Light in *My Darkness*. It advocates teaching of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Christian revelator and theologian who gives a spiritual interpretation of the teaching of Bible and who claims that the second coming of Jesus Christ has already taken place.

In *The Story of My Life* Helen Keller describes her transformation from a child almost wholly without language to an accomplished young woman about to graduate from one of the country's most prestigious college. She gives us glimpse of the world she remembers from before the illness that left her deaf and blind, and then tells us of her home life in the wake of that illness. Unable to see, hear, speak or communicate except the most basic desires, she lives by her own account in a dark prison. Literary critic Michael Berube in "Written in Memory" writes:

> All too often, Keller’s intellectual legacy has been treated as a matter of debits and credits: points for the advocacy of socialism and her ability to inspire; points off for her advocacy of eugenics and her opposition to sing- language education for deaf children. But it can also be said that Keller’s life, together with her life’s writing, testifies to the power- and the utility- of an education dedicated to reading the world’s most challenging writers. (11)

Berube sees the book as raising important questions about the nature of language, originality, and identity. She used simple style to correspond with all varieties of people. Her writing style is full of many types of diction, syntactic devices and patterns of imagery.

The turning point of her life is the arrival of her teacher Anne Sullivan, who managed to break through to Keller emotionally and intellectually and to teach her language. Keller considers that learning process to be the birth of her conscious self. From that time on she is hungry to learn and much of the narrative depicts the difficult yet steady process by which she learns to read, write and even speak, moving from a school for the deaf to a college preparatory school to Radcliffe College, assisted and encouraged by Sullivan the entire way. By the end of *The Story of My Life,* Keller is on the cusp of adulthood, ready to step ‘serene and happy’ from the shadows of solitude into the light of the wider world.

The Story of My Life is not only the assertion of a young woman that she does indeed have a mind of her own, but the story of how she came to be that truly and intelligent young woman. Most of us know Helen Keller as the little deaf and blind girl who triumphed over adversity to become world famous. Keller’s life is neither a miracle nor a joke. It is a tremendous achievement. Seemingly destined to be imprisoned in darkness and isolation for the rest of her life, Keller built upon the brilliant work of her teacher Anne Sullivan to become a nationally recognized and respectable figure. Novelist and essayist Ozick believes that Keller’s true legacy is one that has been overlooked-as writer and artist. He writes:

> She saw, then, what she wished, or was blessed, to see, and rightly named it imagination. In this she belongs to a broader class than that narrow order of the deaf-blind. Her class, her tribe, hears what no healthy ear can catch and sees what no eye chart can quantify. . . She was a member of the race of poets, the Romantic kind; she was close cousin to those novelists who write not only what they do not know but what they cannot possibly know. The most persuasive story of Helen Keller’s life is what she said it was: “I observe, I feel, I think, I imagine.” She was an artist. She imagined.(16)

Keller’s story is a story of courage and determination, of persistence in the face of great odds, of never giving in and remaining cheerfully optimistic no matter what the circumstances. Throughout her life, her force of will was as amazing as her achievements. And despite her inability to see and hear, or what she called her ‘deprivation’, Keller did remain cheerful. She refused to blame anyone for her condition or any bad event that befell her.

For centuries people with disabilities have been an oppressed and repressed group. People with disabilities have been isolated, incarnated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group. Keller through *The Story of My Life* shows us a woman poised on the cusp of a radically changing world. Many people who read her story or meet her not only celebrated her as a miracle, but held her up as a paragon of virtue, innocence and chastity-a pure creature, uncorrupted and unsullied by society.

To prove the hypothesis this researcher has divided the thesis into four chapters. The first chapter is the introduction part, which summarizes the author’s biography and introduces the issues. The second chapter is about the methodology applied in this thesis. The third chapter is textual analysis and the last chapter is the concluding chapter.

II. Disability: The Cultural Model

Disability is a human reality. People of all ages and form of life undergo difficulties in one way or the other. These difficulties are worsened by the society. While some disabilities are congenital, it is that reality that every person stands the risk of being disabled in the course of life. For instance, with the increase in age, all human beings are subjected to disability. But people forget this reality of life. Though the term ‘impairment’ is often exchanged with ‘disability’, their meanings are different. ‘Impairment’ has been defined as the lack of all part of limb or having defective mechanism of the body. But ‘disability’ experience is different which simply means a lack of ability relative to personal or group standard or spectrum. It may include physical, sensory, cognitive or intellectual impairment, mental disorder, or various types of chronic diseases. Disability is a broad term that compares actual ability to normal functioning. It is most often used to refer to impairment, be it physical (paralysis), sensory (blindness), cognitive (dementia), intellectual (mental retardation) or mental health (bipolar disorder).

A person may be considered disabled if he or she has a condition that affects the ability to function without assistance at a level needed to maintain well-being. Reindal define disability as “a physical or mental condition we have a strong [rational] preference not to be in” and that it is more importantly a condition which is in some sense a “harmed condition” (4). Reindal describes this condition as the “medical model” within disability studies”. Reindal, on the other hand endorses an alternative model which sees disability not as a problem that might be susceptible to cures but, she says: On the contrary it is mainly a cultural and socio-political problem. The medical notion of disability, seeing disability as a cause of a limitation within the individual, cannot account for the fact that not all people with losses, diseases, illness etc experience disablement. (5)

In a patriarchal culture, feminity and disability are linked inextricably. Aristotle's comparison of women with disabled men illustrates this fact. Aristotelian assertion that 'the female is as it were a deformed male' . . . . not only does this definition of the female as a 'mutilated male' inform later depictions of woman as diminished man, but it also arranges somatic diversity into a hierarchy of value that assigns completeness to some bodies and deficiency to others"(48). The notion that the disabled body stands in a similar relationship to the non disabled body as the female does to the male has contributed, on the one hand, to the development of sexist medical models which pathologies female bodily functions such as pregnancy and menopause and exclude women from research studies, and on the other hand, to the de-masculinization of disabled men, who are then lumped together with women, children, and the elderly in the realm of abject and dependent bodies. A disability's degree of visibility too affects social relation. Thomson further says:

> [M]any parallels exist between the social meanings attributed to female bodies and those assigned to disabled bodies. Both the female and the disabled body are cast as deviant and inferior; both are defined in opposition to a norm that is assumed to possess natural physical superiority. Indeed, the discursive equation of femaleness with disability is common, sometimes to denigrate women and sometimes to defend them. (19)

On the other hand, nondisabled feminists may actually seek to distance themselves from the disabled body, to prove that the female body is not a diseased or deformed.

The cultural other and cultural self operate together as opposing twin figure that legitimatize a system of social, economic empowerment justified by physiological difference. If it is more visible like birth marks, disfigurement, scars, etc. they are highly stigmatized.

For centuries people with disabilities have been an oppressed and repressed group. People with disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group. No man on the earth is similar to his fellow beings nor are their experiences same. But some are considered ‘normal’ and the other as disable. Before understanding what disability actually means one should understand what the other category of the binary called normal means. Lennard J.Davis in “Constructing Normalcy” writes:

> The concept of a norm [. . .] implies that the majority of the population must or should be part of norm. The norm pins down the majority of the population that [. . .] will always have at its extremities these characteristics that deviate from the norm. So, with the concept of norms comes the concept of deviations or extremes. When we think of bodies in a society where the concept of the norm is operative, and then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants. (13)

Davis clarifies as how the term disability functions to define what normalcy actually means. Those who do not meet the parameters of normalcy are viewed as the people with disability. To have disability is to be an abnormal, to be the part of ‘other’. So the problem is not with disabilities rather the problem lies in the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘Problem’ of the disabled person. This construction of the normalcy however results in the stigmatization of the person with disability.

Stigma is a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or a person. It is a social, cultural and psychological construct which is understood as a kind of negative value and attribute created by the society. Stigma is any condition, attributes or behavior that symbolically marks off the bearer as culturally unacceptable or inferior with the consequent feelings of shame, guilt and disgrace. In other words, it is a social process related to personal experience characterized by exclusion, rejection, blame or devaluation that results from experience of anticipation of an adverse social judgment about a person or a group. In any society, stigma has negative connotation and its discrediting effects are very adverse. Erving Goffman,in his essay “Selections from Stigma” defines stigma as:

> Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. It constitutes a special discrepancy between vital and actual social identity. [. . .] the kind that causes us a reclassify and individual from one socially anticipated category to a different but equally well anticipated one, and the kind that causes us to alter our estimation of the individual upward. Note, too, that both all undesirable attributes are at issue, but only those which are incongruous with our stereotype of what a given type of individual should be. (204)

A stigmatized person is a blemished, not quite human person. "By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human” (205). A stigma is used by others to define a blemished person as different from other humans, thus making them not quite human. Stigma itself comes in three basic types or forms: 1) abominations of the body or “various physical deformities,” 2) blemishes of character or "weak will, domineering or unnatural" beliefs, values and attitudes, and 3) tribal stigma or "race, nation and religion"(Goffmann 206).

Thus many different aspects of human practices and appearances fit under the umbrella concept of stigma. This means that many different humans are regarded by others as not quite human. For example, stigma can be attached to visible and non-visible disabilities, physical abnormalities, unusual body shape or marks, interactional quirks, mental illness, and depending on the context, aspects of gender, sexuality, race, and class. Regardless of such a multitude of specific differences, Goffman says that any stigmatized person:

> . . . . Possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attribute have on us. He possesses a stigma, an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated. We and those who do not depart negatively from particular expectations at issue shall call the normal. (206)

Potentially stigmatized people interact with others who can potentially stigmatize them. The others who possess the potential to stigmatize people are referred to as the ‘normals’. Normals are those who have many different attributes but who do not, in the interactional situation in question, have an attribute of difference. Normals are those who, at least in the face of some individuals and within some interactional situations, do not represent ‘undesired differentness’.

The many different attributes that make up the appearance and the behavior of any normal person are regarded as desired differences. Normals, at the same time, do not possess an obtrusive difference from humanist thus they are normal. Moreover, it is normal for normals to notice those who are endowed with an undesired difference. Individuals with disabilities may experience an existential crisis that may be triggered by the stigma related to having a disability, as well as by conditions created by disability itself. It is a social categorization that legitimates the negative attributes because differences are highlighted than similarity.

Interactions with disabled others are, for Goffman, one such primal scene. Through his theory of the processes of stigmatization, Goffman unwraps the disturbing character of disabled persons whom are found in the midst of the normal. At the same time, interactions with people whose bodies are an abomination to the normal's' sense of the normal body, serve Goffman as a way to highlight the concrete interactional processes of stigmatization. It is easy to understand that disability certainly can be conceived of as an interaction between attribute and stereotype, resulting in a discredited, discreditable, failed, or not quite human person. Disability can be regarded as a powerful and obtrusive trait, a master status, marking all of the other attributes a person possesses. All of this helps to explicate the problem of disability.

Different ideologies are constructed by the society to prove that the disabled people are fundamentally inferior to the so called normal beings. Nevertheless, they were even regarded as less than humans-the "other". As Susan Wendell in her essay, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability" writes:

> Disability is not a biological given; like gender it is socially constructed from biological reality. Our culture idealizes the body and demands that we control it. Thus, although most people will be disabled at sometime in their lives, the disabled are made "the other", who symbolizes failure of control and the threat of pain, imitation,

> dependency, and death. If disabled people and their knowledge were fully integrated into society, everyone’s relation to her/his real body would be liberated. (260)

In a society which idealizes the body, the physically disabled are marginalized. People learn to identify with their own strengths (by cultural standards) and to hate, fear and neglect their own weaknesses. The disabled are not only de-valued for their de-valued bodies they are constant reminders to the able-bodied of the negative body- of what the able bodied are trying to avoid, forget and ignore. Disabled people are ‘other’ to able-bodied people, and the consequences are socially, economically and psychologically oppressive to the disabled and psychologically oppressive to the able-bodied.

Disabled people are still treated as deviating from normal representations of normal people and disabled persons have thus been studied as such. In sociology, disability is often represented as the social problem of deviance. The primal scene of interaction with disabled others has served as data for the study of the social construction of deviance, especially what some sociologists call, ‘involuntary deviance’. In the face of the asocial condition of disability taken as a given, “society considers” (27). The first thing society considers is that it has nothing to do with noticing disability as-a-condition and is unrelated to making it meaningful as such. The next thing society considers is that disabled persons are just like able-bodied persons in the (mystified) sense that both ‘exert no control over this condition.’ Beyond the common and shared conception of disability as a problem condition, other similarities between able-bodied and disabled people disintegrate or disappear in the primal scene of interactional engagement with disabled persons.

Following the lead of society's consideration of disabled persons, the work of some sociologists begins. Society considers disabled persons as deviant and sociologists study disability as ". . . . deviance because they [disabled persons] depart from normative conceptions of 'normal' conditions"(19). The conditions the text highlights include blindness, mental retardation, physical handicaps, referred to throughout as ‘crippled people,’ and obesity and eating disorders. With these abnormal bodies, sociologists can thus study normal reactions to deviant conditions taken as a given. For example:

> People have long recognized the blind as one of the most conspicuous groups of disabled people in society. Because the eyes communicate much human expression, some feel extremely disturbed when they confront blind people. A blind person's gaze does not transmit the same psychological or emotional clues as that of a sighted person. Facial expressions provide less information to others. Various behavioral mannerisms and other visible clues increase the social conspicuousness of the blind, including odd postures, rocking of the head or tilting it at odd angles, and touching objects in a groping manner, as well as distinctive paraphernalia, such as thick glasses, white canes, and guide dogs. (482)

For the able-bodied the disabled often symbolize failure to control the body and the failure of science and medicine to protect us all. However, some disabled people also become symbols of heroic control against all odds; these are the ‘disabled heroes’ who are comforting to the able-bodied because they reaffirm the possibility of overcoming the body. Disabled heroes are people with visible disabilities who receive public attention because they accomplish things that are unusual even for the able-bodied.

It is revealing that, with few exceptions (Helen Keller and, very recently, Stephen Hawking are among them), disabled heroes are recognized for performing feats of physical strength and endurance. While disabled heroes can be inspiring and heartening to the disabled, they may give the able-bodied the false impression that anyone can “overcome” a disability. Disabled heroes usually have extraordinary social, economic and physical resources that are not available to most people with those disabilities. Theorists concerned with disability assert that most nondisabled people feel disabled people symbolize, among other things, imperfection, failure to control the body and everyone’s vulnerability to weakness, pain and death. So pervasive are those projected ablest attitudes that many disabled people also internalize them and replicate a scale of disabilities. Baudrillard predicts that disabled people and their sensibilities will have a pivotal role in this hyperral world. Baudrillard writes:

> Such are the blind, and the handicapped, mutant figures, because mutilated and hence closer to communication, closer to this telepathic, telecommunicatioal universe than we others: human’s all-too-human, condemned by our lack of disabilities to conventional forms of work. By the force of circumstance the disabled person is a potential expert in the motor or sensorial domain. And it is not by chance that the social is aligning itself more and more with the handicapped and their operational advancement: they can become wonderful instruments because of their handicap. They may precede us on the path towards mutation and dehumanization. (18)

Disability is again a cultural and historical construction fabricated by the socio-cultural factors. It is therefore a broad term that clusters ideological categories as sick, deformed, ugly, old, afflicted, abnormal etc. which disadvantages people by devaluating bodies that do not confirm to certain cultural standards. Disability therefore refused to be normalized, neutralized or homogenized.

Social structure therefore draws the artificial line that separates disabled people from others. Disabilities are not mental or physical conditions of the organism which prevent or impair function, and therefore conditions a rational agent would wish to avoid or remedy, but rather, physical and mental impairments may be positive, negative or neutral. On this view, the major disabling features of disability are social rather than physical or 'mental' - the basis of disability is located in social conditions? However, if disability could be identified simply in terms of social conditions, for example, social exclusion, or discrimination, then all victims of racial and gender discrimination would count as disabled and Jews, Blacks and Women would be people with disabilities.. Foucault further comments:

> To return to the problem of legal punishments, the prison with all the corrective technology at its disposal is to be resituated at the point where the codified power to observe; at that point where the universal punishments of the law are applied selectively to certain individuals always the same ones, at the point where the redefinition of the juridical subject by the penalty becomes a useful training of the criminal; at the point where the law is inverted and passes outside itself, and where the counter law becomes the effective and institutionalized content of the juridical forms. (213)

To be disabled in some respects is not to be disabled in all respects. A disabled person may have abilities that the able bodied lack in virtue of being able bodied. Many disabled people are tired of being symbols to the able- bodied, visible only or primarily for their disabilities, and they want nothing more than to be seen as individuals rather than as member of the group, ‘the disabled’. There is a danger sentimentalizing disabled people’s knowledge and abilities and keeping us “other” by doing so.

Disabled people share positions of social oppression that separate us from the able-bodied, and we share physical, psychological and social experiences of disability. Emphasizing differences from the able-bodied demands that those differences be acknowledged and respected and fosters solidarity among the disabled. It challenges the able-bodied paradigm of humanity and creates the possibility of a deeper challenge to the idealization of the body and the demand for its control. Invisibly disabled people tend to be drawn to solutions that emphasize differences, because our need to have struggles acknowledged is great, and we have far less experience than those who are visibly disabled of being symbolic to the able-bodied.

Disability is a socially constructed form of the biological reality because our culture idealizes the body and demands that we must have control upon it. Able bodied thus dictate upon the disabled body and their knowledge always silences individual’s capabilities and true characteristics. The stigma and stereotypes are the cause of discrimination, much more than the disability itself. Hence, it could be argued that the disability is not the cause at all, that the social reaction to disability is the cause, Susan Wendell says; “The power of culture along to construct a disability is revealed when we consider bodily differences-deviations from a society’s conception of a ‘normal’ or acceptable body-that, although they cause little or no function or physical difficulty for the person who has them, constitute major social disabilities" (44).

In this sense, disability functions to preserve and validate such privileged designations as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, and intelligent all of which can claim such status and reside within these social identifies. Foucault further adds:

> The universal juridicism of modern society seems to fix limits on the exercise of power, its universally widespread panopticism enables it to operate, on the underside of the law, a machinery that is both immense and minute, which supports, reinforces, multiplies the asymmetry of power and undermines the limits that are traced around the law. (212)

It is, then the various interactions between bodies and world that create disability from the human variation and instability. In this regard, disability is shaped by history, defined by particularity, and negates the stable physical state of being. In short, the concept of disability writes a heterogeneous group of people whose commonality is being considered as abnormal. It is a social reality than a biological reality.

If, on the other hand, we consider whether there is a social dimension to disability, it seems obvious that there is. Of course social conditions, including human attitudes, can be 'disabling'; but it is somewhat confusing, both grammatically and logically, to think of them as 'disabilities'. The crucial question is whether, if all the social dimensions of disability could be resolved, there would be any other dimensions left and if so how important they would be? In particular would we have any reason to call these non-social, or 'medical' dimensions, 'disabilities' at all and would there be any reason left to alter these factors if we could?

Disabled people are, as Abberley points out, often "only relevant as problems, and are thus excluded from the making of the cultural, political, and intellectual world"(54). Problem is the definition of the situation of disability. Such an understanding does not arise simply because our bodies give us troubles; disability as a problem is presented to people through interaction, with the social and physical environment, and through the social production of knowledge. The over-determined sense in which our culture gives us disability as a problem is shared by the discipline of sociology in that social scientific research, textbooks, and course offerings in, for example, Deviance, represent disability as a ‘problem’ of the body gone wrong.

This problem obtrudes into the social world and is studied by sociologists as such, thus representing disability as a social problem. In his discussion of social representation, Dyer says that a culture’s representation of its people is not a mirror reflection of reality in that "reality is always more extensive and complicated than any system of representation can comprehend"(31). Still, Dyer insists that there is something very real about a culture’s representation of its people, especially its “problem" people. The reality which is of concern to Dyer lies in “. . . Representations here and now have real consequences for real people, not just in the way they are treated but in terms of the way representations delimit and enable what people can be in any given society” (3).

There is nothing new; disability is a problem and it is one of the many problems sociologists have studied, for some time. Involuntary deviance, stigmatized master status, management of a spoiled identity, passing, coping, etc., are some of the most systematic representations of disability as a problem produced by sociologists. there is nothing new about treating disability as a problem. Manifestations of the problem of disability and even institutional processes of its amelioration and control are things which sociologists have studied for many years. In *Disability Studies Reader,* Lennard Davis claims that;

> This reader is one of the first devoted to disability studies. But it will not be the last. Disability studies is a field of study whose time has come. . . . People with disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalize and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group. As fifteen percent of the population, people with disabilities make up the largest physical minority within the United States- one would never know this to be case by looking at the literature on minorities and discrimination. (3)

Disability is still viewed as an unexpected, undesired, asocial, apolitical, bodily condition. Disability is therefore seen as otherness and discriminated from the majority of the society. Both Oliver and Linton articulate the academy's current role in seamlessly stitching together disabled peoples' oppression and the knowledge which justifies this state of affairs.

Thus, the gloss new does not refer to a "paradigm shift." New is not a metaphoric device to refer to some kind of progress of, or evolution within, the production of disability-knowledge. So far, we should posses the sense that whatever the claim to newness means, it is not an announcement of an individual's crowning achievement, nor is it a coded reference to a discipline's birth date, nor is it symbolic of a paradigmatic shift within the academy as a whole. Still, the claim to newness is articulated poignantly and often. What Disability Studies offers the academy is a disciplined way to study and confirm normate culture, and it puts forward the possibility that the values and epistemological assumptions of "normalcy" can be inserted into the world in a new way. For example David Pfeiffer writes:

> Disability studies is a relatively recent rubric that seeks to group research that focuses upon the historical, political, social and professional meanings ascribed to disability and disabled populations. Disability studies take the medicalized model of disability as its primary object of critique. (24)

This study tries to reexamine literary and cultural representation of disability. It is concerned with disability approach in a broader and wider, more critical sense, venturing into the territories such as caste, class, gender, position at office, ethnicity and the color of skin etc. It tries to situate disability as a social construction and a product of cultural rules and people in privileged position.

However, even if every word and deed of the new Disability Studies and of disabled people is taken as mere symptom of the first birth into disability, the phenomenon of confirmation and insertion remains. There is, after all, a growing sense among Disability Studies researchers and disabled people that the beginning of something new has been inserted into the world, most notably a confirmation and critique of normate culture.

The concern of the research therefore is to recognize the voice of the disabled and to subvert the former notion of disability which reflects sham picture of the disabled world. The researcher situates her studies in the text *Staring Back*. The so called disable writers, in these collections enumerate their experiences of disability. Their essays reveal how does society, culture, politics and various other institutions try to establish the idea of disability as natural, fixed and stable category. James I. Porter writes:

> [W]riting the disabled body will mean that our most basic conceptions of the body will need to be rewritten. . . like the normative ideologies of the body to which they often stand opposed, theoretical discourses of the body already contain within themselves a series of unacknowledged and /or disavowed assumptions and theories about disability. Bringing these out for inspection is one way that body theory can begin to learn something from disability studies and can intervene in them in turn. (xiv)

People with disability have been facing isolation, stigma of being labeled as ‘dependent invalids’, and restrictive environments in the guise of safety. Their right to development has been ignored and their potential contribution to society neglected. The world has been gradually shifting towards an approach, which stresses abilities, not disabilities. The new approach promotes people’s rights, freedom of choice and equal opportunities; it seeks to adapt the environment to the needs of persons with disabilities, not the other way round.

The disadvantage related to disability originates from the interaction of the person and the social, cultural, physical and psychological barriers within her or his environment. Barriers may hinder their full and effective participation of people with disability in society on an equal basis with others. Therefore, the negative impact of disability can be prevented or reduced by breaking the barriers in the environment. Of course, it is more reasonable and cost-effective not to construct those barriers in the first place. Interpreting everything disabled people say and do as nothing but a symptom or measure of their conformity to the established meaning of disability, given by normate culture, certainly does seem to eliminate the understanding that disabled people are actors and speakers. David Pfeiffer further writes:

> Historically, disability has been the province of numerous professional and academic disciplines that concentrate upon the management, repair, and maintenance of physical and cognitive incapacity. We rarely consider that the continual circulation of professionally sponsored stories about disabled people's limitations, dependencies, and abnormalities, proves necessary to the continuing existence of these professional fields of study. (1)

It frames disability as a minority discourse and provides complex answers to the puzzle of issues concerned with disability. It tries to reveal new insight into the position of the disabled. The discourses created by the non-disabled is questioned and vehemently criticized as it is biased and distanced from the reality. The existing discrepancies between the able and the disabled people exist because of the social discourses which are constructed and implemented.

Disability studies aims to challenge the received in its most simple form-the body-and in its most complex form-the construction of the body. Since we can no longer essentialize the body, we can no longer essentialize its differences, its eccentricities, and its transgression. Perhaps disability studies will lead to some grand unified theory of the body, pulling together the differences implied in gender, nationality, ethnicity, race, and sexual preferences. Then, rather than the marginalized being in the wheelchair or using sign language, the person with disabilities will become the ultimate example, the universal image, the modality through whose knowing the postmodern subject can theorize and act.

III. Disability as a Socio-Cultural Construct

The Story of My Life published when Keller was only twenty-two–portrays the wild child who is locked in the dark and silent prison of her own body. With an extraordinary immediacy, Keller reveals her frustrations and rage, and takes the reader on the unforgettable journey of her education and breakthroughs into the world of communication. From the moment Keller recognizes the word “water” when her teacher finger-spells the letters, we share her triumph as “that living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free!”(22). An unparalleled chronicle of courage, *The Story of My Life* remains startlingly fresh and vital more than a century after its first publication, a timeless testament to an indomitable will. It is hard to imagine someone so embracing the world who could neither see nor hear it, as Helen Keller did. As she writes:

> It is with a kind of fear that I begin to write the history of my life. I have, as it were, a superstitious hesitation in lifting the veil that clings about my childhood like a golden mist. The task of writing an autobiography is a difficult one. When I try to classify my earliest impressions, I find that fact and fancy look alike across the years that link the past with the present. The woman paints the child’s experiences in her own fantasy. A few impressions stand out vividly from the first years of my life; but “the shadows of the prison house are on the rest.” Besides, many of the joys and sorrows of childhoo have lost their poignancy. (5)

Helen Keller was born a healthy child. When Helen was 19 months old, she became ill with what was known as acute congestion of the brain and stomach; this is now known as scarlet fever. As a result, she was left blind, deaf, and mute. For many of her earlier years Helen lived in darkness with very few ways to communicate with others around her. Obviously her attempts were not always successful. When she failed to communicate she would throw fits and have outburst that would upset not only her, but her family.

A fever she had when she was nineteen months old left her blind and deaf—and her first memories of being disabled, recounting her early attempts to communicate. As she grew up, she managed to learn to do tiny errands, but also realized that she was missing something. Afterward she described herself a "wild, unruly child". Keller writes:

> Soon I felt the need of some communication with others and began to make crude signs. A shake of the head meant "No" and a nod, "Yes," a pull meant "Come" and a push, "Go." Was it bread that I wanted? Then I would imitate the acts of cutting the slices and buttering them. If I wanted my mother to make ice-cream for dinner I made the sign for working the freezer and shivered, indicating cold. My mother, moreover, succeeded in making me understand a good deal. I always knew when she wished me to bring her something, and I would run upstairs or anywhere else she indicated. Indeed, I owe to her loving wisdom all that was bright and good in my long night? (10)

Keller was sent to a state school for the blind, but failed first grade because she could not read Braille. At the age of fourteen, she was physically more developed than most of the girls of her age. For medical and cosmetic reasons, her eyes were removed and replaced with glass ones. Against overwhelming odds, she waged a slow and difficult but successful battle to re-enter the world.

Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, advised Keller's to ask the director of the Perkins Institution about obtaining a teacher for Helen. Keller reviews her parents' efforts to find her medical treatment and educational assistance, as well as her early experiences with her first teacher, Anne Sullivan. She writes:

> Dr. Bell advised my father to write to Mr. Anagnos, director of the Perkins Institute in Boston, the scene of Dr. Howe's great blind, and ask him if he had a teacher competent to begin my education. This my father did at once, and in a few weeks there came a kind letter from Mr. Anagnos with the comforting assurance that a teacher had been found. This was in the summer of 1886. But Miss Sullivan did not arrive until the following March. (19)

Following the illness that left her blind and deaf, Keller got accustomed to the darkness and the silence but retained the memories of the sights and sounds she had enjoyed before her illness. Keller devised a simple system of gestures and tried very hard to make herself understood by her family. She knew when she was being difficult, but she felt she had to resort to fits of temper and frustration because the few signs she used to express herself were inadequate.

A near-savage deaf and blind mute child grew into a woman who wrote, spoke, and labored incessantly for the betterment of others and almost single-handedly destroyed age-old myths about blindness and handicapped persons. Helen Keller's intelligence and passion for learning had become evident, and she began her lifelong journey of knowledge. Keller's life is an example of rising odds. Keller writes:

> I do not remember when I first realized that I was different from other people; but I knew it before my teacher came to me. I had noticed that

> my mother and my friends did not use signs as I did when they wanted anything done, but talked with their mouths. Sometimes I stood between two persons who were conversing and touched their lips. I could not understand, and was vexed. I moved my lips and gesticulated frantically without result. This made me so angry at times that I kicked and screamed until I was exhausted. (11)

She quickly mastered the alphabet, both manual and in raised print for the blind, and gained facility in reading and writing. Michael J. Mazza believes Helen Keller as a revered figure in American popular culture. Struck deaf and blind by illness at the age of 19 months, she still managed to get an education and become a writer and activist.

As a young girl Keller was obstinate, prone to fits of violence, and seething with rage at her inability to express herself. But at the age of 7 this wild child was transformed when, at the urging of Alexander Graham Bell, Anne Sullivan became her teacher, an event she declares "the most important day I remember in all my life." What John Marta L. Werner Macy called the “un analyzable kinship” Keller and Sullivan begins with the latter’s desire to make contact with another—a “deaf blind”—whose ability to enter into community with her is denial of separateness so radical that teacher and student exist as a “collaborative consciousness”. The inarticulate little deaf and blind girl grew into a highly intelligent and sensitive woman who wrote, spoke and labored incessantly for the betterments of others. In a memorable passage, Keller writes of the day:

> We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word *water*,

> first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten-a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away. (22)

Anne Sullivan was a skilled, dedicated teacher. Anne Sullivan was Helen’s tutor who motivated her to study and compelled her to use her sense of touch and her mental power to achieve all the success that she was capable to achieve. Because of Anne Sullivan's patience, persistence, and high expectations, Helen learned to speak, read, write -- and sing! The act of collaboration between Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan can be understood as a trajectory in which several moments succeed one another.

Although most critical accounts of the composition of *The Story of My Life* underscore the collaborative nature of the venture, the composition and publication of story marks the end, not the beginning, of the most radical phase of the Keller Sullivan partnership. The story of Helen Keller is the story of a child who, at the age of nineteen months, was suddenly shut off from the world, but who, against overwhelming odds, waged a slow, hard, but successful battle to reenter that same world. Keller further writes:

> At the beginning I was only a little mass of possibilities. It was my teacher who unfolded and developed them. When she came, everything about me breathed of love and joy and was full of meaning. She has never since let pass an opportunity to point out the beauty that is in

> everything, nor has she ceased trying in thought and action and example to make my life sweet and useful. (36)

Indeed, this initial autobiography is at once a far-reaching experiment in multiple authorship and a profound disruption of Keller and Sullivan’s prior conception and presentation of themselves as a symbiotic being. Anne Sullivan deservedly acquired the reputation as a legendary teacher.

Helen Keller's life is an exemplar of rising against odds. While some are born great, as Shakespeare's Malvalio told us, some, like Helen Keller, achieve a greatness of their own; but few are dealt such a short hand with which to achieve it. Against physical conditions that would enslave even the strongest of women, Helen Keller challenged her multiple disabilities and became an educated young women in spite of them. Blind and deaf at two, Helen Keller's story of bravery and fortitude and her remarkable relationship with her beloved teacher Ann Sullivan, is a delicate lesson in the ability of the extraordinary few to triumph over adversity. As a young girl, Keller was powerless to express herself.

Throughout her life, Helen Keller devoted her energies to humanitarian pursuits, advocating for economic justice and the rights of women and of people with disabilities. Keller asserted her right to feel at home in the great world and through her eloquence and tireless activism, she fought for the same right on behalf of all people. Helen Keller’s influence is great and her accomplishments won her worldwide respect. She writes:

> Meanwhile, the desire to express myself grew. The few signs I used became less and less adequate, and my failures to make myself understood were invariably followed by outbursts of passion. I felt as if invisible hands were holding me, and I made frantic efforts to free

> myself. I struggled-not that struggling helped matters, but the spirit of resistance was strong within me; I generally broke down in tears and physical exhaustion. If my mother happened to be near I crept into her arms, too miserable even to remember the cause of the tempest. After awhile the need of some means of communication became so urgent that these outbursts occurred daily, sometimes hourly. (17)

Until at the age of 7, an event happened that she declares, 'the most important day I remember in all my life.' The event she describes is the day Anne Sullivan became her teacher. She overcame the seemingly insurmountable obstacles of deafness and blindness to become an influential lecturer and social activist. Keller has become, in American culture, an icon of perseverance, respected and honored by readers, historians, and activists.

When she was a child, Keller received a letter from a writer that she quoted in her autobiography: ‘‘some day you will write a great story out of your own head, that will be a comfort and help too many.’’ (200).This statement proved prophetic, as her autobiography *The Story of My Life*, published in the United States in 1903, is still read today for its ability to motivate and reassure readers. In her time, Keller was a celebrity and the publication of her autobiography was met with enthusiasm. The book was generally well received, and Keller later wrote a follow-up called *Midstream, My Later Life* in which she tells what happened in the twenty-five years after the publication of *The Story of My Life*. Hubbard argues that children’s books on Helen Keller’s life ignore her controversial- and often radical- political activism in order to tell a tale of “individual” triumph that distorts and demeans her life:

> The mythical Helen Keller creates a politically conservative moral lesson, one that stresses the ability of the individual to overcome

> personal adversity in a fair world. The lesson we are meant to learn seems to be: “Society is fine the way it is .Look at Helen Keller! Even though she was deaf and blind, she worked hard – with a smile on her face- and overcame her disabilities. . . So what do you have to complain about in this great nation of ours?”. . . .It’s time to stop lying to children and go beyond Keller’s childhood drama and share the remarkable story of her adult life and work. What finer lesion could children learn than the rewards of the kind of engaged life that Helen Keller lived as she worked with others toward a vision of a more just world? (76)

Without the ability to see or hear, Keller learned to function and interact within society in a meaningful way. Her drive to make a place for herself in the world started when she was very young. Once she overcame her obstacles and learned to communicate, she was driven to accomplish her high goals. Even as a child, she found ways to help her mother around the house, rather than stay in a world that was dark, silent and lonely.

This is the world that Keller entered as a young adult: a world that was not likely to accept her as a woman with a disability. Keller is an extraordinary person not because she overcomes blindness or deafness rather she should be great for her contribution to achieve social changes.Yet Keller tells us that through her hard work and determination and that of her tutor, Annie Sullivan, sent by the Perkins Institute, herself partially sighted, she was able to learn to communicate through sign language and speech, and would develop the ability to read and write Braille in five languages. Keller writes:

> I had now the key to all language, and I was eager to learn to use it. Children who hear acquire language without any particular effort; the words that fall from others' lips they catch on the wing, as it were, delightedly, while the little deaf child must trap them by a slow and often painful process. But whatever the process, the result is wonderful. Gradually from naming an object we advance step by step until we have traversed the vast distance between our first stammered syllable and the sweep of thought in a line of Shakespeare. (27)

Due in part to her family's connections as well as through her own charisma and the fact that she had a compelling personal story, Keller received support in being able to pursue an education at Radcliff College and is recognized as the first person who was deaf-blind to earn a Bachelor's degree.

Helen Keller may be the world's most famous supercrip. Very few people can claim to have "overcome" disability so thoroughly and spectacularly as Helen Keller who imagined a life without being able to see or hear and not knowing how to communicate with anyone around you. The deaf-blind, in particular, were regarded by their parents as pariahs, a retribution for their own sins. Even for a loving mother and father, they were almost impossible to handle. As a result of their intense frustrations at not being able to communicate, deaf-blind children, or ‘children of the silent night,’as the blind commonly refer to them, throw temper tantrums, scratching, biting, hitting, and pinching other people. Helen Keller was no exception. No one had the heart to discipline her. Keller writes:

> My parents were deeply grieved and perplexed. We lived a long way from any school for the blind or the deaf, and it seemed unlikely would come to such an out- of-the-way place as Tuscumbia to teach a child

> who was both deaf and blind. Indeed, my friends and relatives sometimes doubted whether I could be taught. My mother's only ray of hope came from Dickens's "American Notes." She had read his account Laura Bridgman, and remembered vaguely that she was deaf and blind, yet had been educated. But she also remembered with a hopeless pang that Dr. Howe, who had discovered the way to teach the deaf and blind, had been dead many years. His methods had probably died with him; and if they had not, how was a little girl in a far-off town in Alabama to receive the benefit of them? (17-18)

She was willful and quick-tempered by nature and tyrannized the household. She smashed dishes and lamps, plunged her hands into people's plates.

On one occasion she dashed into the parlor in her red flannel underwear and pinched her Grandma Adams, chasing her from the room. Helen could neither see nor hear other people's reactions and had no idea of the pain she inflicted. That world o darkness is what Helen Keller lived in for six years. Helen Keller has been an inspiration to people ever since she turned six. From 1886-1960, she proved herself to be a creative and inspiring woman of America. She was a writer and lecturer who fought for the rights of disadvantaged people all over the world. Most importantly, she overcame her two most difficult obstacles, being blind and deaf. Keller writes:

Helen Keller devoted her life to improving the education and treatment of the blind, deaf, and mute and fighting for minorities as well. Miss Keller was one of the first to educate the public and make them aware of inflicted individuals' potential. Because of her persistence and strength, she is considered a creative and unique spirit by many people of the world, especially those who can relate to her physical impairments.

People take advantage of having the privileges to see, hear, and speak. Some people, unfortunately, are blind, deaf, and mute. These unfortunate people take more time to appreciate life and the wonders it has to offer. Helen Keller could have lived her life in complete darkness, but through her own determination and the lifelong dedication of Annie Sullivan, Helen triumphed over triple disabilities of blindness, deafness and a severe speech impediment. Helen writes:

> I learned a great many new words that day. I do not remember what they all were; but I do know that *mother, father, sister, teacher* were among them-words that were to make the world blossom for me, “like Aaron’s rod, with flowers.” It would have been difficult to find a happier child than I was as I lay in my crib at the close of that eventful day and lived over the joys it had brought me, and for the first time longed for a new day to come. (23)

She traveled the world bringing hope and inspiration to the handicapped and became a world-famous speaker and author, best remembered as an advocate for the handicapped as well as countless other causes. The author, Helen Keller, is one such person who is blind, deaf, and mute. She believes strongly that people, who are fortunate to have such senses, take life for granted. She also believes strongly in living life to the fullest, meaning, accomplish what you can today instead of leaving it for tomorrow.

Helen Keller was an American author who lived to educate and inspire others to become the most unique author of her time. She was a gifted woman who had exceptional writing abilities. She utilized simplistic style to correspond with all varieties of people. She wrote to inspire people and to help disabled people achieve their goals. Her writing style was full of many types of diction, syntactic devices, and patterns of imagery to exemplify her life chronicle. Keller used an unadorned tone with superb expressions and descriptions .Keller would go on to work with the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) from its conception in 1921, until her death in 1968. Keller was passionate about advocating for the rights of persons who are blind and deaf-blind. Helen writes:

> No deaf child who has earnestly tried to speak the words which he has never heard-to come out of the prison of silence, where no tone of love, no song of bird, no strain of music ever pierces the stillness-can forget the thrill of surprise, the joy of discovery which came over him when he uttered his first word. Only such a one can appreciate the eagerness with which I talked to my toys, to stones, trees, birds and dumb animals, or the delight I felt when at my call Mildred ran to me or my dogs obeyed my commands. It is an unspeakable boon to me to be able to speak in winged words that need no interpretation. (57)

Her views, articulated in her writings of 1914 , and elaborated upon by Quicke were radical for the time, centering on the concept of 'handicap' as a social maladjustment rather than an illness, and the condition of blindness as being caused by ignorance, poverty and the unconscious cruelty of commercial society. These ideas sound very similar to what is now considered the social construction of disability.

Unfortunately, many of Keller's views on this subject were not spread to the larger public as they did not fit within the dominant discourse. In *An Intimate History of Humanity* Theodore Zeldin writes "no history of the world can be complete which does not mention Mary Helen Keller. . . . whose overcoming of her blindness and deafness were arguably victories more important than those of Alexander the Great, because they have implications still for every living person" (109).It is important to note that Keller's passion and advocacy for minorities extended to other persons and minority groups facing barriers.

Herrmann details Keller's life and the controversies that surrounded it, attempting to discover the "real" Helen Keller. She explores Keller's psychological makeup, her little – discussed sexuality, her relationship with her family and Sullivan, her political activities, and her complex legacy as an advocate for the deaf and blind. Herrmann further writes:

> To her family, this new, crusading Helen was almost as remote and unreachable as the barbaric child who had pinched them until they bled. Recently she had confessed to a reporter with an exalted look in her sightless blue eyes that she felt "like Joan of Arc at times"… Her relatives failed to realize that her monumental childhood rage had not been dampened- it had simply been channeled into a political and social activism they found equally incomprehensible. As far as the perplexed Keller family was concerned, her on orthodox social views brought shame, not glory, to the family. (45)

A hero is a person who can impact the world and inspire others to do great things and Helen Keller is one of them. And what makes Helen Keller heroic is that she took her hugest adversity, and allowed it to test her strength and her character. She was persistent and dedicated enough to not let her limitations stop her from reaching her goals; for example graduating from college. What is unique about Keller's story is that she is an example of how influential a hero can have on a person's life, and that it is in fact cyclic.

The idea that woman with disabilities could be so outspoken regarding issues not related to disability, such as worker's rights, does not fit with the nice picture painted of the disabled hero. Sullivan was Keller's hero in teaching her how to overcome her disabilities; Keller became her own hero in order to actually work through her struggles, and Keller was in fact a hero for others by advocating for people with similar disabilities. She is an example of spirit and love overpowering physical limitations. She is an inspiration to everyone, with or without disabilities. Keller writes:

> I think only those who have escaped that death-in-life existence, from which Laura Bridgman was rescued, can realize how isolated, how shrouded in darkness, how cramped by its own impotence is a soul without thought or faith of hope. Words are powerless to describe the desolation of that prison-house, or the joy of the soul that is delivered out of its captivity. When we compare the needs and helplessness of the blind before Dr. Howe began his work, with their present usefulness and independence, we realize that great things have been done in our midst. (248)

Helen Keller has no sight because she was visually impaired and no hearing because she was deaf. She couldn't even see anything not one speck of color and all she could hear was pin drop silence. From childhood, Helen Keller lived in a world of darkness where she couldn't see or hear anything anyone was saying. Against physical conditions that would enslave even the strongest of women, Helen Keller challenged her multiple disabilities and became an educated young women in spite of them.

Today, almost anything we do requires our eyes and ears yet Helen Keller found a way past this and went on leave more than just her lifetime legacy, but also her heroism. From childhood, Helen Keller lived in a world of darkness where she couldn't see or hear anything anyone was saying. Today, almost anything we do requires our eyes and ears yet Helen Keller found a way past this and went on leave more than just her lifetime legacy, but also her heroism. Helen Keller was a woman who transcended many boundaries to assist the many people such as the deaf and the blind.

Helen Keller is the epitome of a heroine because she uses her intelligence and courageous spirit to help others and concurrently shows that no physical impairment can stop anyone as long as they have a goal they're willing to achieve. Blind and deaf at two, Helen Keller's story of bravery and fortitude and her remarkable relationship with her beloved teacher Ann Sullivan, is a delicate lesson in the ability of the extraordinary few to triumph over adversity. She describes her teacher as:

> My teacher is so near to me that I scarcely think of myself apart from her. How much of my delight in all beautiful things is innate, and how much is due to her influence, I can never tell. I fell that her being is inseparable from my own, and that the footsteps of my life are in hers. All the best of me belongs to her-there is not a talent, or an inspiration or a joy in me that has not awakened by her loving touch. (36-37)

Wherever deafness and blindness are viewed as human adversaries, Helen Keller is known as a hero. The young deaf-blind girl who learned to read and write beyond all expectations has been immortalized in story, drama, and film. The story of her inspirational triumph over disability emerged as an international sensation during her lifetime and has been retold in an almost unbroken record of new publications since her death more than 35 years ago.

Throughout her life, Keller counteracted the idea that persons with disabilities are less fit than non-disabled people. As a socialist and social activist, Keller advocated not only for the rights of persons with disabilities, but also for the rights of other marginalized groups. The image of Keller that the media, governments and organizations created was, and is, ideal for so many because it is safe and it fits well with dominant ideas about disability. It would have been easy for Ms. Keller to simply give up with bitterness on life, to give in to the darkness and the isolation.

At a time when persons with disabilities were thought to be unable and unfit to participate in society, or even to live, Helen Keller spoke out for the rights of persons with disabilities. She spoke out on political issues, in a time when it was unpopular for women to speak out on such issues, much less women with disabilities. As she writes:

> At first I was most enthusiastic in its support, and I never dreamed that any grave objections could be raised except indeed by those who are hostile to teacher; but now, after thinking most seriously and consulting my friends, I have decided that-‘s plan is by no means feasible. In my eagerness to make it possible for deaf and blind children to have the same advantages that I have had, I quite forgot that there might be many obstacles in the way of my accomplishing anything like what-proposed. (238)

Her socialist writings and speeches influenced many in society, despite the fact that there was so much opposition to her participation in the political arena. All the opposition she encountered indicates that she was a threat to the typical make the world especially receptive to accepting persons with disabilities; Helen Keller made it clear that persons with disabilities are valuable members of society, that they do make valid contributions to the political arena, and that they have the same rights to personhood as anyone else.

Journalist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Lash chronicles the relationship between Keller and Sullivan. He sets their lives within the broad social context of their times, discussing Sullivan’s pedagogy, Keller’s politics and activism, and both women’s struggles together to earn a living and make their way to world. He writes:

> One approached the world with a chip on her shoulder and assumed everyone was ready to knock it off; the other reached out to the world with a heart filled with love and kindness and assumed the world would reciprocate. It was the difference between the manners of Tewksbury [the poorhouse in Massachusetts where Sullivan spent several years as a child] and Tuscumbia, between being brought up amid the cruelties of the almshouse and the affectionate warmth of an upper middle-class Southern home, between an Irish cultural eritage of black pessimism and hot hatred of patronizing rulers and the genial, self-confident outlook of a class that despite the Civil War was still master. (25)

But too intelligent and independent to remain merely a cherished figurehead, Helen soon began branching out, speaking out not only for the rights of the handicapped, but for others that she saw as oppressed. She became radically left wing, joining the Socialist party, supporting the rights of laborers as well as equal rights for women and blacks. She gave personal comfort and encouragement to blind and impoverished African Americans, was a founding member of the ACLU, and participated in rallies and marches.

She was a vocal supporter of women's right to vote and their right to birth control. She even convinced Israelis to stop segregating the blind and disband a village set aside for their use. She is practically a saint for having overcome such adversity.

Dennis Dravelle writes: "This well-proportioned biography of the deaf and blind girl who became a great American crusader rescues its subject from the shackles of sainthood without destroying her as an American hero" (16). Instead of sinking to that dark separation from others, she made the choice to connect -- to reach out and to give and receive with the human race, not just on a personal level (as with Anne), but on a global level. She writes:

> We had a long talk with Dr. Bell. Finally he proposed a plan which delighted us all beyond words. He said that it was a gigantic blunder to attempt to found a school; for deaf and blind children, because then they would lose the most precious opportunities of entering into the fuller, richer, freer life of seeing and hearing children. I had had misgivings on this point; but I could not see how we were to help it. However Mr. Bell suggested that- and all my friends who are interested in my scheme should organize an association for the promotion of the education of the deaf and blind. (239)

Her ability to overcome the limitations caused by her sensory disabilities not only brought hope for many like cases, but also raised radical scientific questions as to the depth of the brain's ability. Helen Keller has proved to be one of the greatest role models of not just disabled people, but also people striving towards a goal. Against physical conditions that would enslave even the strongest of women, Helen Keller challenged her multiple disabilities and became an educated young women in spite of them.

As diverse as her interests were, Helen Keller never lost sight of the needs of her fellow blind and deaf-blind. She was always willing to help by appearing before legislatures, giving lectures, writing articles, and above all, by her own example of what a severely handicapped person could accomplish. When the American Foundation for the Blind, a national information clearinghouse, was established in 1921, she at last had an effective outlet for her efforts. From 1924 until her death she served on the Foundation staff as a counselor on national and international relations. It was also in 1924 that she began her campaign to raise an endowment fund for the Foundation. Until her retirement from public life, she tirelessly sought to make the fund adequate for the Foundation's needs. Helen writes:

> Well, I must confess, I do not like sign language, and I do not think it would be of much use to the deaf-blind. I find it very difficult to follow the rapid motions made by the deaf-mutes, and besides, signs seems a great hindrance to them in acquiring the power of using language easily and freely. Why, I find it hard to understand them sometimes when they spell on their fingers. On the whole, if they cannot be taught articulation, the manual alphabet seems the best and most convenient means of communication. At any rate, I am sure the deaf-blind cannot learn to use signs with any degree of facility. (228)

Of all her contributions to the Foundation, Miss Keller was perhaps most proud of her assistance informing its special service for deaf-blind persons in 1946. Despite her retirement from public life, Helen Keller was not forgotten. She was honored by universities and institutions throughout the world. She held honorary membership in scientific societies and philanthropic organizations throughout the world.

If history is filled with figures who stand on the shoulders of giants, then surely those figures are even more gigantic still—Helen not only learned to speak and read and listen and write, but she learned to speak with the power of a renowned lecturer, to read in five different languages, to listen to life with a keen ear and to write acclaimed books and articles. In short, she challenged our conception of just how much adversity human greatness can overcome. Many who observed Keller- and to some she was a curiosity and publicity seeker found it difficult to believe that a person so handicapped could acquire the profound knowledge and the sensitive perception and writing talent that she exhibited when she was mature. Keller writes:

> My friends thought we might have one two pupils in our own home, thereby securing to me the advantage of being helpful to others without any of the disadvantages of a large school. They were very kind; but I could not help feeling that they spoke more from a business than a humanitarian point of view. I am sure they did not quite understand how passionately I desire that all who are afflicted like myself shall receive their rightful inheritance of thought, knowledge and love. (238).

Keller was forced to squeeze herself into a non-disabled world, so that the world would not have to adapt to allow persons with disabilities. Helen Keller always insisted that there was nothing mysterious or miraculous about her achievement. All that she was and did, she said, could be explained directly and without reference to a ‘sixth sense’. Her dark and silent world was held in her hand and shaped with her mind.

Helen Keller today remains a woman whose astounding personality and accomplishments attract widespread admiration and awe. Her valiant life continues to raise complex thinking about her; one’s own brain goes only so far. Those of us with five senses are missing a sense of how Helen Keller thought with three. Helen Keller spent a life in helping others. She had boundless energy. Many people noticed her kindness, generosity and enthusiasm. She thought the best of people and typically brought out the best. She never lost a sense of true empathy for the disabled. She had a sparkling humor and a warm handclasp that won everyone easily. She exuded vitality and optimism. She writes:

> I think there about 3,000 people in Tuscumbia, Ala, and perhaps half of them are colored people. At present there is no library of any sort in the town. That is why I thought about starting one. My mother and several of my lady friends said they would help me, and they formed a club, the object of which is to work for the establishment of a free public library in Tuscumbia. (199)

Helen Keller would not be bound by conditions. Rendered deaf and blind at 19 months by scarlet fever, she learned to read in several languages and even speak, eventually graduating with honors from Radcliffe College in 1904, where as a student she wrote *The Story of My Life*. That she accomplished all of this in an age when few women attended college and the disabled were often relegated to the background, spoken of only in hushed tones, is remarkable.

But Keller's many other achievements are impressive by any standard: she authored 13 books, wrote countless articles, and devoted her life to social reform. An active and effective suffragist, pacifist, and socialist, she lectured on behalf of disabled people everywhere. She also helped start several foundations that continue to improve the lives of the deaf and blind around the world. She is against inspiration for millions who are deaf, blind, both or neither. As she writes:

> It gives me great pleasure to hear how much is being done for the deaf-blind. The more I learn of them, the more kindness I find. Why, only a little while ago people thought it quite impossible to teach the deaf-

> blind anything; but no sooner was it proved possible than hundred of kinds, sympathetic hearts were fired with the desire to help them, and now we see how many of those poor, unfortunate persons are being taught to see the beauty and reality of life. Love always finds its way to an imprisoned soul, and leads it out into the world of freedom and intelligence! (224)

Helen’s success would have been impossible without the cooperation of others like Anne Sullivan, who stands as a reminder that only through cooperation and dogged determination combined can any human being live a life which is worthy of the name. By overcoming difficult conditions with a great deal of persistence, Helen grew into a respected and world- renowned activist. Most importantly, Keller became a world-famous advocate for people with disabilities.

The story of Helen Keller has been told again and again, and yet it still touches people. Her courageous life and her triumphs over adversity inspire, amaze, and captivate audiences new and old. Helen Keller, a woman who, struck deaf and blind as an infant, went on to alter society's perception of what it meant to be disabled. She was deeply influenced by the intellectual and activist atmosphere of the progressive era in which she lived. Thus Keller could lambaste American society for denying her opportunities as a disabled person while simultaneously turning her back on disability rights as a spokesperson for the then-paternalistic American Foundation for the Blind, and even publicly supporting euthanasia for “the unfit."

IV. Helen Keller as differently abled

Disability is seen as public enigma and public threat. To be disabled is to be an ‘other’ in the social group. Furthermore, disabled personalities are not treated on equal ground. They are marginalized in every sector as in health, education, economy and others. In short, disabled people are socially unacceptable in one or the other way, it is measured in terms of the social conceptual framework of norms. Many people have different attitude toward disabled people.

People with disabilities have had and continue to have lower educational rates, lower incomes, and less social influence than those considered nondisabled. People with disabilities have been and frequently continue to be defined access to public space and participation in public events. People with disabilities faced and do face discrimination as a social grouping. But Helen Keller is such a person who has achieved a lot of success in her life despite of all the hindrances she had faced being physically disabled. She has amazed the world with her courage, determination, strength and amazing will. She overcame all the obstacles and never let her disability come in her path of glory and became an accomplished, unique and inspiring individual. Like other people with disabilities, Helen Keller deserves to be known for herself and not defined by her blindness or her deafness. She saw herself as a free and self-reliant person — as she wrote, "a human being with a mind of my own"(105).

During her life Helen Keller came to be seen as a heroic figure, a symbol of courage in the face of adversity. She showed that being disabled did not mean a person could not possess high intelligence, ambition, or the ability to achieve great accomplishments. Despite her own unfortunate circumstances she devoted her life to helping others and was a tireless activist for racial and sexual equality as well as disabled rights. It is easy to see why, even today, Helen Keller remains a figure whose achievements and personality are viewed with widespread admiration around the world. This thesis provides an overview of the life of a woman who, at a time when the lives of most disabled people were constrained by their society's medical, philosophical, social, and economic limitations, managed to rise above her affliction and show the world that disability did not mean a person could not have an impact upon the world. Despite her unfortunate visual and auditory disadvantages, Helen Keller, referred to by Mark Twain as the most wonderful creature in the world, appears to be one of the most inspirational American reformers of the Progressive era. But it seems her words have stretched beyond her own time period as millions of people are still inspired today by her extreme optimism. Her perseverance and determination despite her disability makes her one of the most remarkable woman in history. Her work allowed so many people to persevere through their struggles.

More than anything else, Helen Keller helped destroy the myth that the disabled are incapable of overcoming adversity and becoming successful and productive members of society. Helen Keller, a woman who, struck deaf and blind as an infant, went on to alter society's perception of what it meant to be disabled.

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