A PSYCHOBIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF
HELEN KELLER

by

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DECLARATION:

I, Desiree Martina van Genechten, hereby declare that this treatise is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment to another university or for another qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This psychobiographical study of Helen Keller's life is exploratory-descriptive in nature. The subject was chosen through purposive sampling. The choice was based on the researcher's personal interest and the remarkable impact this profoundly handicapped woman had within her society. Helen Keller also meets the psychobiographical requirements. These include that she is historically well known, inspirational, and her life has been completed.

The study uses a qualitative, single case, interpretive research design. The design is employed to study Helen Keller's entire life span within a formal psychological theory. The theory used in this study is Daniel Levinson's (1996) Life Structure theory of adult development. Data for this study were collected from a variety of primary and secondary sources which provided alternative perspectives on her life. In addition, the data have been corroborated by historical texts, and newspaper and journal articles.

Levinson's (1996) theory divides the lifespan into four developmental eras, each with its own biopsychosocial character. Each era in turn is divided into shorter periods of development, each with particular developmental tasks. Cross-era transitions separate the eras. By describing and exploring the data according to this theory, Helen Keller as a profoundly handicapped person is shown to display universal patterns of development as suggested by Levinson. At the same time, the Life Structure she developed, her life components, and Satisfactoriness illuminated her uniqueness.

Through the application of the theory to Helen Keller's life, this psychobiographical study facilitated an examination of the theory. This led to suggestions for potential development of the theory.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. General Orientation to the Research Study

This section provides a brief overview of the context and aim of this study. It then orientates the reader to the theoretical aspects of the study. In the subsequent sections the subject is introduced and an overview of the sources from which the data were collected are offered.

1.1.1. Contextualisation

The aim of psychobiographical research is to obtain a holistic view of an individual's life. As such it is necessary to contextualise the socio-economic and historical period in which the individual lived. Such contextualisation facilitates the interpretation and understanding of a person's life story within the hermeneutic approach (discussed in section 2.1.2.).

Helen Keller, the subject of this study, was born in 1880 and would have been influenced by a variety of contextual factors, some of which are mentioned here. With the advent of industrialisation, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a period of not only economic transformation and progress, but also had far reaching social effects, particularly in the United States of America (USA) and many European countries (Bates, 1976; Sklar, 1992). In the southern states of the USA, where Helen Keller hailed from, differences between people were negatively emphasised (Berger, 2004; Foner, 1994; Keller, 1903). Segregation took place along lines of socio-economic status, race and gender and the handicapped were banished from society in a number of ways (Braddy-Henny, 1958; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1903).

During those times, those who challenged the status quo were regarded as rebels or revolutionaries and were often ostracised or imprisoned (Davis, 2003). Today, however, the emphasis is on the integration of people of differing genders, cultures, races and abilities. One might ask how this change comes about. For example, how does a female handicapped 'rebel' of the early 1900s become a revered legend and recognised as an extraordinary individual?

There are surely a variety of logical and valid explanations in response to such a question. For example, such understanding can partly be attributed to the feminist

movement (Sklar, 1992) and more humane perspectives of mental illness and physical disabilities. The researcher of this study is of the opinion that one reason for such change lies with the growing understanding that humans share universal patterns of development while appreciating each individual's unique traits.

1.1.2. Aim of this Study

The aim of this study is to explore and describe the life of Helen Keller, a handicapped person, within the formal psychological framework of Levinson's (1996) life structure theory. It was hoped that in such a manner it could be established whether the life structure development of a specific handicapped person, Helen Keller, displays similar patterns to those described in Levinson's (1996) theory. The secondary aim was to uncover Helen Keller's unique life structure, in addition to the presence or absence of universal patterns of development as proposed by Levinson. This in turn may illuminate aspects that contributed to Helen Keller's extraordinary accomplishments.

1.1.3. Overview of the Psychobiographical Approach

Psychobiography is the study of an individual's life, through the substantial use of formal psychological theory (Schultz, 2001, 2005a, 2005b). This method of research developed since psychological researchers began employing a wider variety of hermeneutic approaches to the study of lives (McAdams, 1988; Runyan, 1988b).

Psychobiography is a qualitative case study that is longitudinal and cross-cultural in nature (Anderson, 1981a, 1981b). That is to say, the subject studied usually lived in a different time-period and different culture from that of the researcher.

Further, psychobiographical studies are seen as morphogenic in nature. In other words, the subject's characteristics are highlighted in a holistic manner rather than in terms of isolated events, thus the emphasis is on uniqueness of the whole person rather than on single elements (Runyan, 1982a).

The purpose of this research approach is to simultaneously elucidate universal patterns and unique traits. By so doing it provides a psychologically more satisfactory, cohesive understanding of the subject's life. This type of research does not seek to generalise the findings to a population, rather its intention is to generalise the findings to the theory used (Yin, 2003). Psychobiographical research then can be

viewed as one approach to psychological research, as it is through the in-depth study of an individual over the entire lifespan that understanding is advanced.

The subject of the psychobiographical research is typically, but not necessarily, an individual of greatness or historical importance (Schultz, 2005a). The life of the subject has usually been completed.

According to Carlson (1988), Edwards (1998) and Roberts (2002) psychobiographical research contributes to the development or refinement of existing psychological theories through the confirmation or refutation of theoretical constructs and suppositions. It is hoped that this study on Helen Keller will contribute to the development of the psychobiographical research method and add to the growing body of such research conducted in South Africa, as well as confirm or refute propositions of Levinson's (1996) life structure theory.

1.1.4. Overview of the Theoretical Framework

The formal psychological theory utilised for this study was Daniel Levinson's (1996) life structure theory. It provides an alternative to the traditionally used psychoanalytical approach.

Levinson (1996) posits that men and women evolve through a similar sequence of developmental periods and tasks. This thus suggests a universal pattern of development. He, however, recognises and advocates that individuals simultaneously develop a unique life structure. In addition, a functional life structure is one which accommodates and supports the individual's biopsychosocial context and is adapted and modified according to external and internal aspects. This conceptualisation facilitates the analysis of different individuals within the psychological framework.

The life structure theory (Levinson, 1996; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson & McKee, 1978) identifies four eras of development, each spanning 25 years, that extend across the lifespan. Each of these eras has its own biopsychosocial character, adding to the holistic nature of the theory. Within each era are shorter developmental periods, each with its own developmental tasks. Transitional periods of approximately five years mark the transitions individuals negotiate as they evolve from one era to the next.

In order to obtain an in-depth focus within the constraints of a master's treatise, four aspects of the theory were selected to anchor the analysis of Helen Keller's life. These were the developmental periods, developmental tasks (both discussed in

Chapter Three), and the interwoven concepts of satisfactoriness and components of life structure (discussed in section 3.2.).

The above research approach and psychological theory were applied to the life of the research subject, Helen Keller.

1.2. Research Subject

Helen Keller was chosen for this study using purposive sampling. This choice was made for two reasons. Firstly, on the basis of the researcher's interest in the remarkable impact this profoundly handicapped woman had within a patriarchal, discriminatory society. A second reason was a personal interest stemming from the researcher's own visual impairment.

Helen Adams Keller (herein after referred to as Keller) was born on 27 June 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama, USA. Keller is known for her impact as a deaf-blind person. She lost her sight and hearing due to illness at the age of 19 months. With no sight and no sound Keller was deprived of communication until the age of six. It was Anne Mansfield Sullivan (herein after referred to as Miss S), a young visually impaired tutor, whose commitment broke through the barriers, lifting Keller from her dark, silent, isolated world (Royal National Institute for the Blind [RNIB], 1995-2008). Despite Keller's handicaps and delayed learning opportunities her extraordinary character became evident. With her remarkable ability and desire to learn she waged a successful battle to communicate and work in a patriarchal, prejudiced, ignorant world of sight and sound. In addition to signing on the palm of the hand, Keller also learned to read Braille in English, French, German, Greek and Latin (American Foundation for the Blind, 1885-1980).

At the age of 24, Keller was the first deaf-blind person to graduate from a college. During her years at college she wrote her first book, *The Story of my Life*. She was a highly intelligent woman, an author, activist and lecturer. In her work for the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), she travelled to many countries around the world, educating politicians, philanthropists, and the public at large (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). In this way she raised funds for the blind and gave them a voice.

Keller was a member of the socialist party, was strongly opposed to war and campaigned for progressive causes. Some of her actions were an embarrassment to her family, threatened her saintly public image, and were deserving of Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) observation (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007).

Keller was acquainted with, and influenced by, several famous people such as Mark Twain and Alexander Graham Bell, as well as being the guest of numerous presidents and kings. Her life story has been depicted in several films, documentaries, biographies, and autobiographies throughout the past century. She has been recognised and awarded for her extraordinary achievements through honorary degrees, the Presidential Medal of Freedom and her election to the Woman's Hall of Fame. Keller passed away on 1 June 1968, at her home at Arcan Ridge, Westport, Connecticut, USA.

1.3. Sources of Data

The data collected on Keller's life were drawn from a variety of sources. The sources selected were not only for cross-referencing of biographical information (Yin, 2003), but were specifically chosen with a view to obtain varied perspectives on Keller's life. In this way the internal validity of the study could be enhanced. Both primary and secondary data were utilised. The sources of data, and the reason for their selection, are briefly mentioned below.

The autobiography titled *The Story of my Life* (Berger, 2004) was originally written by Keller in 1903. This edition however includes the original, as well as letters written by Keller, her teacher, Miss S, and commentary by John Macy. This book provides insight into Keller's early life to the age of 23. An essay written by Keller in 1903, titled *Optimism* reflects a multitude of Keller's aspects, such as her love of literature, the dawning of harsh social realities, and her hope. The biography on Miss S written by Keller in 1958, generally known as *Teacher*, but with the full title of *Teacher, Anne Sullivan Macy: A Tribute by the Foster-Child of her Mind*, was selected as the researcher believed that this would provide data about Keller's later life. The researcher also suspected that since the book was written with the focus on Miss S, and after her death, Keller may have revealed more about her own perspectives than she might have previously done.

Helen Keller: A Life (Herrmann, 2007) provided a well researched, more objective biography on Keller's entire life. The book *Helen Keller* (Davis, 2003) is part of the 'rebel lives' series. This book introduces Keller as a revolutionary activist, who is better known for her blindness than her radical social views. It was selected in an attempt to gain an alternative perspective to the saintly image portrayed by many

writers. This book presents numerous newspaper and journal articles that illustrate Keller's views, character, development and desire to serve the marginalised.

Blind Rage: Letters to Helen Keller (Kleege, 2006) is an illustration of how Keller's extraordinary accomplishments and saintly image have set a high standard for other hearing and vision impaired people and caused resentment in some. The author of *Blind Rage* is visually impaired and offers alternative speculation on various events in Keller's life, quite different to those posed by mere sceptics.

1.4. Structural Overview of the Treatise

This treatise consists of eight chapters. The overview above provides a general orientation to the reader. Each aspect is elaborated on in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Two aims to provide an understanding of psychobiography as a research approach. This is done through the clarification of terms and concepts. The value of psychobiographical research concludes the chapter. Chapter Three introduces and describes Levinson's life structure theory. Chapter Four is a two-part chapter. The first part deals with the ethical considerations of conducting a psychobiographical study. The second part discusses the preliminary methodological considerations of the study. Chapter Five is the chapter that sets out the research design through which the aims of the study are accomplished. The method of data collection and analysis are clarified in this chapter, too.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight deal with the practical aspects of this study. Chapter Six contains the data collection and findings and simultaneously provides the biographical information. The findings are then discussed in terms of the four selected theoretical concepts in Chapter Seven. The concluding chapter draws this study to a close with an overview of the challenges, limitations and value of this study. Recommendations for future research are also suggested in Chapter Eight.

Conclusion

The context, rationale and broad concepts of this treatise have been introduced as well as the theoretical and practical structure of the treatise. The following chapter discusses the psychobiographical research approach and its relationship to psychology.

CHAPTER TWO

A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF PSYCHOBIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

This chapter aims to provide an understanding of psychobiography as a research approach. First, a brief overview of research paradigms and several research methods are provided. Thereafter, a description of psychobiography and definitions of terms and concepts related to psychobiography are presented. These concepts are defined in an attempt to distinguish them from one another, and to clarify their relationship to psychobiography. The relationship between psychology and biography is then discussed, and the history of psychobiography is outlined. Finally, the values of psychobiographical case study research are presented.

2.1. Research Paradigms

Within the fields of quantitative and qualitative research, there are a number of paradigmatic research approaches. The main paradigms are positivist (empirical), interpretive (phenomenological) and constructionist (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Numerous models and theories constitute each paradigm. For the purpose of this treatise the hypothetico-deductive model of the positivist paradigm will be highlighted together with several approaches to the interpretive (phenomenological) paradigm.

Historically, psychology was dominated by experimental research methods in its quest to attain the status of the natural sciences. This is seen in psychology's preoccupation with objectivity in research methods, particularly noticeable in the positivist paradigm. However, phenomenologists like Giorgi (cited in Lindegger, 2006) argue that psychology cannot directly apply the methods of natural science.

2.1.1. The Hypothetico-deductive Model

According to Karl Popper's model (cited in Willig, 2001), research begins with a theory about the nature of the world. The theory is empirically tested by deriving hypotheses through deductive logic, or conclusion drawing. The hypotheses are then tested by observing, exploring, and describing the phenomenon, sample or subject. The inductive logical phase then follows, when the findings are interpreted and the theory adjusted to fit the newly discovered facts (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

In other words, this model tests the truth of claims made by theories through falsification, or refutation.

However, Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1999) and Roberts (2002) point out the shortfalls of this model, describing it as elitist and not allowing for the development of psychological theories. As Levinson (1996) comments, "unfortunately, they [positivist models] are poorly suited to exploratory research" (p. 10) and fail to recognise the social, cultural and historical influences on knowledge formation.

Although the hypothetico-deductive model falls within the empirical positivist paradigm, and has serious shortfalls, it provides a starting point for understanding the process of psychobiographical research.

2.1.2. Phenomenological Models

Phenomenology derives from the existential-phenomenological approach in philosophy. It is concerned with human existence, the way in which phenomena are experienced, and how individuals gain knowledge about the world they live in (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993). Thus, human activity can be seen as text (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Phenomenology assumes that individuals exist in a dialectical relationship with their lived world of experience, and focuses on the 'self-world' relationship. It also assumes that different individuals can have vastly divergent experiences of the same 'objective' conditions. This is because experience is mediated by the individual's thoughts, beliefs, expectations, and judgements. In other words, people attribute meanings to events that then shape their experiences of these events (Stroud, 2004; Willig, 2001).

In the same vein, phenomenology acknowledges that any insights gained from the analysis of a text are necessarily the product of interpretation, and hence subject to the researcher's individual meanings. Phenomenology aims to better understand the participant's psychological world and holds that such understanding can only be gained through the researcher's engagement with, and interpretation of, the participant's account (Roberts, 2002; Stroud, 2004).

Similarly, the view of the hermeneutic approach is that in expressing one's experience of the world a 'story' is told, and in so doing the experience is understood. The hermeneutic position emphasises that an individual's life and story are only

meaningful in and through mutual interaction (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993). Three differing hermeneutic views on interpretation are briefly introduced here with particular interest in the latter two.

The first, proposed by Collingwood (cited in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993), sees interpretation as re-enactment or reconstruction. Secondly, according to Gadamer (cited in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993), interpretation is dialogic – a dialogue with the text. It engages the reader in a game of question and answer, resulting in a fusion of horizons, and is said to bring the reader closer to the truth. According to Josselson and Lieblich (1993), "this version of hermeneutic interpretation is characteristic of those approaches within psychology that focus on concrete processes of meaning-making in individual life…The method used aims to give researchers access to the world of the individuals in which they are interested" (p. 9).

The third view is one of intertextuality. Derrida (cited in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993) holds that interpretation is a process of placing a text in a different context. By so doing the text is related to numerous other texts, creating new relations and producing new meanings.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) point out that the challenge for phenomenological researchers, therefore, is to explore and describe the lived world and its temporal, spatial, and interpersonal characteristics, suspending all preconceptions.

2.2. Psychobiographical Research
2.2.1. Description and Definition of Psychobiography

Biographical research is part of the broader practice of qualitative research methods. Qualitative research, as discussed in section 2.1., has a number of features stemming from its philosophical and theoretical approach to the social world.

Several authors (such as Howe, 1997; McAdams, 1994; Runyan, 1982b; and Schultz, 2005a) have defined psychobiography in varying terms, however all encapsulate its essence. A composite definition would be that psychobiography is an in-depth study of one person's life within the framework of any formal psychological theory.

Psychobiographical research makes systematic use of various forms of biographical material, such as autobiographies, biographies, newspaper articles and the like. The aim is to explore, understand, and illuminate the development of

creative and original thought processes, experiences, and actions of exceptional individuals, within their socio-historical context. Psychobiography encompasses both adaptive and maladaptive aspects of an individual's life, without the intention to "pathologise" (Schultz, 2001, p. 3). Psychobiographical research is said to be longitudinal and cross-cultural in nature. Longitudinal refers to the study of an entire lifespan rather than a particular episode within the lifespan. Cross-cultural refers to the application of psychological theories and concepts, developed in the twentieth century, to lives lived in previous centuries (Anderson, 1981a, 1981b). In other words, the subject of the study can be from a different culture or have lived in a different historical era to that of the researcher. This treatise focuses on the entire lifespan of Keller (1880-1968), applying a theory which Levinson conceptualised in 1996. Hence this study is both longitudinal and cross-cultural in nature.

Although biographical research and qualitative research have common characteristics, the former has its own challenges. An initial problem in the field of biographical research is in defining terms within this context when many of them have other meanings in other contexts. Terms key to biographical research are therefore explained in the following section.

2.2.2. Terms and Concepts Related to Psychobiography

In this section, terms and concepts related to the psychobiographical study of lives are briefly defined. The aim is to differentiate the terms and concepts from one another, yet indicate how they are related to and have contributed to psychobiographical research.

2.2.2.1. Personality Assessment

A *personality assessment* may use psychometric testing and interpretation to assess personal characteristics and behaviour (Aiken, 2002). These assessments look at lives in progress, focusing on what the individual is like at the time of the assessment, as well as analysing the influences that shaped or moulded the individual. It has built-in predictors of behaviour that are not necessary in psychobiographical studies.

A psychobiography, on the other hand, focuses on the completed life over time. It aims to provide explanations for aspects of the life history which are not easily derived through the use of simple psychological principles (Alexander, 1988). Carlson (1988) added that psychobiography enables human development to be traced

in 'finished' lives with the added advantage of considering the socio-historical context of the person being studied.

2.2.2.2. Historiography, Historical Psychology, and Psychohistory

Historiography is historical research with the aim of reconstructing the past in order to provide meaningful explanations. Data are collected from various sources of information, such as government documents, newspaper editorials, artefacts and photographs (Anderson, 1990). It is more than the mere retelling of facts from the past. It is a systematic collection and objective evaluation of data related to past occurrences (Green, 2006).

Historical Psychology is simply the history of psychological phenomena and psychological development (Runyan, 1988b). *Psychohistory* is a historical exercise in which past social, cultural or political events are interpreted within a formal psychological theory (Runyan, 1982b, 1988b; Schultz, 2001).

2.2.2.3. Narrative

The human ability to tell stories enables people to make sense of their past, present and future within their contexts (Elms, 1994). As Josselson and Lieblich (1993) note, a story interprets experiences, making their meaning explicit.
Bromley (1986) defines *narratives* as accounts of a series of events that can take the form of a story or a log. The emphasis is on description rather than explanation and focuses on the whole person rather than only a certain aspect of the person (Elms, 1994; McAdams, 1988).

Both narrative and psychobiography facilitate understanding of human behaviour through the sequential study of development (McAdams, 1988; Smith & Watson, 2001). The benefit of studying human behaviour and development in a holistic manner is reflected in the increasing interest by psychologists in the study of life stories.

2.2.2.4. Life Stories and Life Histories

Life stories are subjective accounts of relationships, events and circumstances in an individual's life. They can be oral or written accounts. Life stories can vary depending on the narrator's attitude and feelings, as well as the attention paid to detail

(Smith & Watson, 2001). The focus is more on meanings of events and circumstances than on facts (Bromley, 1986).

Life histories examine relationships in many lives. They attempt to find commonalities and patterns within a cohort in order to facilitate understanding. An attempt is made to reconstruct and interpret the major formative, critical, and culminating episodes in the lives of people (Bromley, 1986). Multiple sources of information are used, including subjective data (life stories) and objective data (historical documents, interviews, and family archives) (Bromley, 1986; Smith & Watson 2001).

2.2.2.5. Case Studies

Case study research is the study of psychological phenomena in the natural context. Lindegger (2006) gives a detailed description of case studies:

> Case studies are intensive investigations of particular individuals. They may
>
> also be studies of single families, units (e.g., hospital wards), organisations
>
> (e.g., Non-governmental Organisations dealing with HIV/Aids), communities
>
> (e.g., an informal settlement), or social policies. Case studies are defined as
>
> ideographic research methods; that is, methods that study individuals as
>
> individuals rather than as members of a population. (p. 460)

Case studies are non-experimental and thus cannot be controlled. Qualitative techniques and methods are employed to collect and analyse the data. Due to its apparent unstructured nature, this type of research has been regarded as unscientific, however this viewpoint is changing (Edwards, 1998).

According to Lindegger (2006) case studies are usually descriptive in nature and provide rich longitudinal information about the phenomenon under investigation. They have the advantage of allowing new ideas and hypotheses to emerge from in-depth observation. Case study research is not orientated to generalise the results to other people, rather it aims to generalise the findings to specific selected psychological theory (Yin, 2003). The case study is used to examine, or critically reflect on existing theory and can be used to generate new hypotheses and theory.

Whereas case studies are seen as ideographic in approach, psychobiographical studies are morphogenic in approach. In other words, although both concern the

study of individuals, case studies examine a discrete event in time, whereas a psychobiography studies the formation of structures, and patterns of differentiation and growth that occur throughout the individual's development, and places the unique individual in context. Although biographical research differs somewhat from the case study method, they are both forms of case research, and share fundamental characteristics (McLeod, 1994).

2.2.2.6. Autobiography and Biography

According to Smith and Watson (2001) "in Greek, *autos* signifies 'self', *bios* 'life', and *graphe* 'writing'" (p. 6). Thus, "self life writing," is a brief definition of "autobiography". Philippe Lejeune (cited in Smith & Watson, 2001) gave a more expanded definition of autobiography as "the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he put the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality" (p. 6).

An autobiography is referred to as a primary document, and is written from a subjective perspective. Thus it is considered to be a selective, subjective, and biased account, keeping in mind that the subject is the author of an identity – an "artful self-invention" (Schultz, 2001, p. 10). In this treatise, *The Story of my Life* written by Keller in 1903 is an example of such a document.

In *biography*, life histories of others are documented and interpreted from a point of view external to the subject (Smith & Watson 2001) and are therefore referred to as secondary documents (Neuman 2006). The story can be told with or without the subject's co-operation. Either way, the resulting biography can be comprehensive and accurate, or biased, inaccurate or incomplete (Green, 2006). Howe (1997) holds that a good biography should focus on the distinct and unique character of the subject in order to illuminate his or her life. Schultz (2001) argues that the psychological viewpoint of the individual is missing in a biography, but points out that a psychobiography meets this shortcoming.

Having teased out various terms and concepts related to psychobiography, the interrelatedness between psychology and biography is explored in the next section.

2.3. Psychology and Biography

Psychologists who study lives are likely to find themselves listening to the stories their subjects or others tell. Whether conveyed through folk tales, myths, legends,

history, stage productions or films (McAdams, 1994) the aim is to uncover the central pattern or theme that underlies and animates the individual's life. According to Josselson and Lieblich (1993) human life is a process of narrative interpretation. Psychology's aim is to study this process, and understand the story of life, and in doing so, change it if required. Psychologists then are dealing, in one way or another, with biography (McAdams, 1988; Stroud, 2004). Biographers on the other hand 'write lives', as discussed in the previous section. Psychobiographical research is an interesting, stimulating, and rapidly developing field. It seeks to understand individuals' changing perceptions and experiences of daily life (Roberts, 2002).

   Despite this interest in the stories of individuals, psychology has traditionally been theory-centred and has relied on the scientific (positivist) approach to study human development (Stroud, 2004). It is assumed in the positivist approach that the study of individual lives can not contribute to the formulation of psychological theory. However, due to the integration of biography and scientific psychology, psychological theory can be developed through the investigation of individual lives. Furthermore, it has been suggested that a psychologically informed biography is likely to be the best approach to capture a human life placed in the context of time (McAdams 1994). This is done through the application of biographical data to psychological theory. Levinson (1996) argues that:

> This biographical method is the only one that enables us to obtain a complex picture of the life structure at a given time and to delineate its evolution over a span of years. It is well suited for gaining a concrete sense of the individual life course, for generating new concepts, and for developing new hypotheses that are rooted in theory and relevant to the lived life. (p. 12)

It thus stands to reason that an ever increasing number of psychologists support the use of psychologically focused biographies as a means to gain insight and to confirm, refute or develop psychological theories. In addition, scholars of biography and scientific psychology have been drawn into the biographical research method of psychobiography in their attempt to answer an array of questions about extraordinary individuals. One such question is 'How do certain individuals fulfil their potential and in particular, develop into extraordinarily creative, productive or capable people?'

The biographical approach, however, is not free from criticism. The major criticisms levelled at biographical methodology are that it is generally too subjective, and that the vast quantity of information prevents rigorous scientific research (Anderson, 1981a, 1981b; Runyan, 1982b). A counter-argument offered, is that these criticisms are indicative of an overly narrow view of science, which neglects the fact that good biographical studies are highly illuminating (Stroud, 2004).

Elms (1994) referred to the interdisciplinary relationship between psychology and biography as an uneasy alliance. Psychobiography remains one of the most rapidly developing and often controversial forms of qualitative research (Willig, 2001). However, to dismiss this methodological approach would discourage the study of unique patterns of development and individual personalities (Howe, 1997). Furthermore, the study of an individual's entire life would be neglected.

It is noteworthy that an ever increasing interest and acceptance of biographical approaches has developed and been employed by social scientists, and developmental and personality psychologists (Elms, 1988; Runyan, 1982; Schultz, 2005a).

What follows is a brief account of the history of psychobiography and its value in psychological research.

2.4. History of Psychobiography

According to Schultz (2001) psychobiography has its roots in ancient Greece, with a modern version appearing in 1910, in the form of Freud's psychobiography of Leonardo da Vinci. At the time, psychological biographies were regarded as applied psychoanalysis. Their pathographic focus, that attempted to expose the neurotic drives of well-known figures, attracted severe criticism. This is exemplified in the psychobiographical study of Florence Nightingale, written by Lytton Strachey, who suggested that selfish compulsions were the motivating factors for her good deeds and caring of others (McAdams, 1988).

Psychobiographical studies have appeared intermittently throughout the twentieth century. Such psychobiographies include *The Mind of Adolph Hitler* by Lange (written in the 1940s but only published in 1972), Erickson's *Young man Luther* in 1958 and *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Non-Violence* in 1969 (Runyan, 1988a). In the past two to three decades an increasing number of social science researchers have employed the biographical method (Runyan, 1988a). There are clear indications that academic interest in this field is increasing. Several universities now

offer psychobiographical courses (Elms, 1988; Runyan, 1988b, Schultz, 2005a). The growing body of psychobiographical studies produced at South African universities (e.g. *Jan Christian Smuts* by Fouche (1999); *Helen Martins* by Bareira (2001); *Winnie Mandela* by Simango (2005); *Eugene de Kock* by Espinoza (2006), and *Mother Teresa* by Stroud (2004)) also bears testament to the far-reaching development of this form of psychological research.

2.5. The Value of Psychobiographical Case Study Research

In this section, the value of psychobiographical research is broadly covered. This includes aspects ranging from the uniqueness of the individual under study, Keller in this case, to the context in which she lived. In addition, through the hermeneutic approach the researcher develops empathy (Kelly, 2006b) while simultaneously examining and possibly developing the psychological theory employed.

2.5.1. Uniqueness of the Individual

Psychobiographical studies employ a morphogenic approach. This emphasises the individuality of the whole person within that person's context (Runyan, 1982b). In addition, psychobiographies enable the study of the unique characteristics of the person being studied. It is this unique and holistic description that is one of the strengths of life history research (Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994).

2.5.2. Socio-historical Context

As a psychobiography draws its data from biographical and autobiographical material, the researcher is provided with a wide range of contextual information. This includes information about the person's family history and relationships as well as their socio-historical and cultural contexts (Runyan, 1982b). These contexts and their influence on the person's development are taken into account in psychobiographical research (Roberts, 2002). Such contextualisation allows for a rich, holistic understanding of individuals and their development, constituting another advantage of this approach.

2.5.3. Process and Pattern over Time

The psychobiographical study focuses on the 'completed life', from birth to death (Carlson, 1988). This enables the researcher to study patterns of human development over time. Hence, the development of personality as it occurs over a lifespan can be comprehensively described and understood (Alexander, 1990).

2.5.4. Subjective Reality

It is important for the researcher to understand the subject's life story from the subject's perspective, as people are all authors of their own identity (Schultz, 2001). This requires a hermeneutic and phenomenological approach. According to Runyan (1982b), the resulting empathy and sympathy which develops from such engagement aids the researcher in portraying a clear picture of the subject's life story. This, after all, is one of the central concerns of psychology and social sciences (Runyan, 1982a).

2.5.5. Theory Testing and Development

In psychobiographical research, theory and case material have a bidirectional relationship. Biographical material provides an ideal laboratory for the examination and development of theories of human development (Carlson, 1988). While theory provides a framework for formulating research objectives and design, it also guides the data collection and analysis process through conceptualising the data within theoretical constructs (Green, 2006). The theory serves as a template against which the research findings are compared. This is referred to as analytical generalisation as opposed to statistical generalisation (Yin, 2003). Psychobiography therefore is both inductive and deductive research (Bromley, 1986). Thus, another value of psychobiography lies in its ability to examine, extend or develop theory.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the research methods and the terms and concepts of psychobiographical study. The concluding extract illustrates the relationship of these concepts to the development, history and value of psychobiographical research in psychology.

> The discussion within the philosophy of history about the relation between life
>
> and story has consequences for the field of psychology in its reference to the

place of stories in individual life. Like historians who tell stories about the past, people tell stories about their life. Stories are somehow important for our identity: they tell us who we are. (Josselson & Lieblich 1993, p. 6)

CHAPTER THREE

OVERVIEW OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY:

LEVINSON'S LIFE STRUCTURE THEORY

As discussed in Chapter Two, psychobiographical research studies the life of an individual within a formal psychological theory. In this study the life structure theory developed by Levinson in 1996 provides the framework within which Keller's life is studied. This chapter aims to describe the theory and define its central concepts.

3.1. Contextualising the Theory

Levinson's (1996) life structure theory[1] is a stage theory of development throughout an individual's life, with particular emphasis on adult development. His 1996 study of 45 women from diverse backgrounds is specifically employed for the study of Keller for several reasons. Firstly, it acknowledges possible gender differences. Secondly, the variables of age and occupation between participants are taken into account. Levinson (1996) found that both genders, as well as individuals of varying occupation and lifestyle, move through the "same sequence of periods at the same ages. At the same time, there are wide variations between and within the genders, and in concrete ways of traversing each period" (p. 6). Thirdly, parallels can be drawn between Keller and the sample of 'career women'. For example, these women

> (though still a small minority) entered a high-status male occupational system
>
> and tried to make occupation a central component of their life
>
> structure…before the 1970s a career path in this field was virtually closed to
>
> women...[who were] unmarried, and childless. Both the benefits and the costs
>
> of this life were substantial. (Levinson 1996, p. 8)

To facilitate an understanding of the theory, first a broad introduction is provided after which key concepts within the theory are defined. This section is then followed by an overview of each stage of development.

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[1]   Unless otherwise indicated, the researcher has used Levinson, D. J. (1996). *The seasons of a woman's life*. New York: Ballentine Books, as the reference for Levinson's life structure theory in this treatise. For pragmatic purposes the full reference to this text is not used throughout this chapter.

3.2. Introduction and Key Concepts

Levinson's (1996) life structure theory is a stage theory of development, however he explicitly points out that "these periods are *not* periods in a single aspect of living, such as personality, cognitive, moral, or career development. They are, rather, periods in the development of the adult *life structure"* (p. 6).

Although the broad scaffolding of this theory depicts development as a sequence of successive stages through which all individuals are said to move, Levinson emphasises evolution, and the uniqueness of each life within this scaffolding. The life structure is central to his theory, and is shaped by both the physical and social environments throughout the lifespan. It is the underlying pattern or design of an individual's life at a given time.

Levinson (1996) emphasises the individual's various relationships with others as "the primary components of a life structure" (p. 22). These relationships include those with family, friends, work, community, and religious affiliations. "The Other also may include a person from the past, a symbolic or imagined figure, a group or institution, an aspect of nature, a loved (or hated) place, even a painting or a book" (Levinson 1996, p. 22). According to Levinson, individuals experience life through these relationships, and "their existence and evolution contribute to the individual's unique life structure" (Levinson, 1996, p. 22). Other relationships are not overlooked, and include the person's relationship between the self and race, socio-economic status, political circumstance, community, leisure, recreation, and the use of solitude, relationship to the body (including bodily health and illness), and more.

Adult development is viewed by Levinson (1996) as a "process of stability and change, continuity and discontinuity, orderly progression as well as stasis, regression, and chaotic flux" (p. 1). It is not a case of simple continuation. Furthermore, although adult development is seen as a process of growth and gradual decline, Levinson does not view it as simply a continuation of childhood development, or as a prelude to old age. Development, in Levinson's view, has the bilateral aspects of positive growth and negative growth. "Adolescing"*,* means to move toward adulthood, and suggests positive growth toward a potential optimum. "Senescing", on the other hand, means to move toward old age and suggests negative growth and dissolution. However, when studying adult development, both "adolescing" and "senescing" occur throughout the entire life cycle, but their character and relative balance change appreciably from era to era.

To further describe Levinson's theory, explanations of the following key concepts follow: lifespan, life course, life cycle, eras and cross-era transition periods.

Lifespan is the chronological period of time from birth to death. *Life course* is the sequence of an individual's life as it progresses through time. *Life cycle* and *life structure* are the underlying patterns of the course of an individual's life that make it unique, and are discussed in more detail below.

The idea of the life cycle as used in this theory "goes beyond that of the life course, [and is intended to imply] an image of an underlying order in the human life course; although each individual life is unique, everyone goes through the same basic sequence" (Levinson 1996, p. 9). In other words, the life cycle refers to the life structure that develops and changes throughout the lifespan and is concurrent with the stages of development in the life course of an individual.

The life structure, according to Levinson, develops through the interaction and interweaving of internal and external aspects. Internal aspects include such factors as personal characteristics, subjective meanings, motivations and goals. External aspects include social context, roles, and events in the individual's life. With regard to these relationships, Levinson proposes that there are three main components that play out in the life structure, namely: central, peripheral and unfilled components.

Central components are those that are most significant to the individual. The most time and energy are invested in these aspects of life, such as family or career, and they influence the other components. *Peripheral components* are those that can be changed or eliminated more easily and have little influence on other components if change occurs. Less time and energy are invested in these aspects. *Unfilled components* are important to the individual. They are things the person wants but has not managed to attain. Their absence impacts on development. These three components contribute to "satisfactoriness" (Levinson 1996, p. 28).

Satisfactoriness of the life structure does not refer to the individual's satisfaction or lack of fulfilment with life. Rather, it refers to how successfully the life structure (e.g. choices) provides the individual with successes, rewards, and advantage as opposed to failures, deficit or disadvantage when considering external circumstances. In conjunction with this, the suitability of the life structure to personal attributes (or internal resources) is also important in evaluating satisfactoriness.

The life structure underlies the life cycle which is divided into four seasons or eras. Each *era* is qualitatively distinct in its biopsychosocial character, yet relatively stable

in terms of a period of time. Each era is seen as part of, and coloured by, the whole and is equally important in the life course. As already mentioned, development does not proceed smoothly and continuously through the eras, rather change and adjustment occurs within each era, and a transition is required for the shift from one to the next. The periods of shift are referred to as transition and cross-era transition periods. For a better understanding, the structure of the life cycle is discussed below.

3.3. Structure of the Life Cycle

As mentioned above, the life cycle consists of a basic sequence of four developmental periods called eras. Each era is biopsychosocially distinct in nature and influences the individual as a whole. "Each era of the life cycle must be characterized by an underlying unity in the overall character of living during those years. It cannot be defined solely in terms of one aspect of living" (Levinson 1996, p. 17).

Each era lasts approximately twenty-five years. According to Levinson, although the eras start and end at an average identified age, there can be individual variation. This variation can be two years above or below the average age and appears in both male and female development. The four eras are: Pre-Adulthood (birth to 22 years), Early Adulthood (17 to 45 years), Middle Adulthood (40 to 65 years) and Late Adulthood (60 to death).

Movement from one era to the next is signalled by major changes in the nature of the individual's life, and requires adjustment and adaptation. This period, of approximately five years, represents the cross-era transition. The *cross-era transition* is the period in which one era ends and the next begins, with possible overlap of developmental tasks of the two eras. Thus, this period is a part of each era and yet qualitatively different. There are three developmental tasks that characterise the transition, or structure-changing periods. These are (1) the termination of an era, (2) individuation and (3) initiation of a new era. Developmental crises can often occur in a transitional period.

Three cross-era transition periods mark the shifts between the four eras (see figure 3.1), namely: Early Adult transition (17 to 22 years), Mid-life transition (40 to 45 years) and Late Adult transition (60 to 65 years). The primary tasks of each transitional period are to reappraise the existing structure, to explore the possibilities

for change in self and world, and to move toward commitment to the choices that form the basis for a new life structure in the following period.
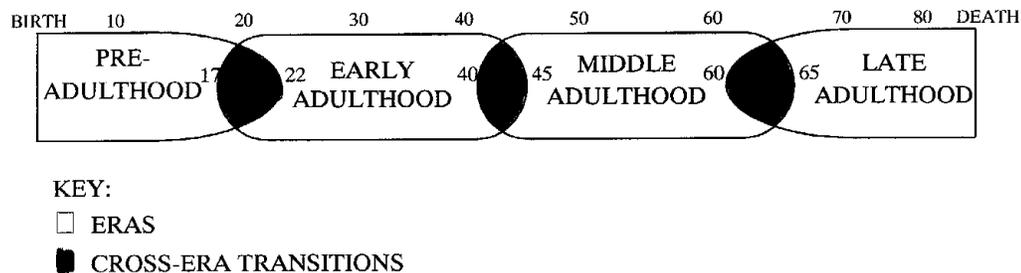
Figure 3.1 A conceptualisation of Levinson's life cycle

(Adapted from van Genechten, 2007)

The eras of development are now outlined with a fuller discussion of each of the more specific periods of development.

3.3.1. Era of Pre-adulthood (birth - 22 years)

The developmental periods commonly identified in this era are: infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and early adult transition. This era is characterised by the most rapid growth physically, cognitively, and emotionally. Although this era is not the focus of Levinson's theory, the broad biopsychosocial character and influences of each stage are outlined here.

3.3.1.1. Infancy (birth - 2 years)

In the period of infancy the individual is relatively vulnerable and dependent. The child, typically, lives in a social family unit, that provides protection, socialisation, and support. During this period the infant separates from the mother both physically and psychologically, and becomes individuated (Santrock, 2002). This stage of development is regarded as critical for the development of the individual's personality, and the relationship with the caregiver is crucial.

3.3.1.2. Early Childhood (2 - 6 years)

Play and an expanding social world beyond the family unit characterise this period of development. Children in this stage typically develop sensitivity toward others,

and a need to help. Emotional struggles within the family are usually resolved in this period. A concept of self begins to develop and children describe themselves in terms of name, age, gender, address, and friends. Self-discipline and the ability to work also begin in this period (Santrock, 2002).

3.3.1.3. Middle Childhood (6 - 12 years)

The period of middle childhood is a time of relative calm as development is not as rapid as the preceding or successive periods (Santrock, 2002). Emotions however, do become more complex. The self-concept continues to develop, and it is at this time, that certain experiences have significant consequences on the development of the self-concept (Bareira, 2001).

3.3.1.4. Adolescence (12 - 17 years)

Adolescence is characterised by bodily changes and sexual maturation (Santrock, 2002). The adolescent becomes aware of the self as an independent, unique person. The self-concept and identity are influenced by numerous diverse aspects of life. These include the cultural and historical context, as well as factors such as living conditions, poverty, and meaningful relationships or the lack thereof (Bareira, 2001).

3.3.2. Early Adult Transition (17 - 22 years)

This first cross-era transition is the concluding period of the Pre-adult era, and the initial period of the Early Adult era. It is also the period in which the childhood life structure is terminated, as well as being the period in which the Entry Life Structure of Early Adulthood is initiated. According to Levinson, it is characterised by uncertainty. As individuals move from childhood into Early Adulthood, they do not know what to expect and the future is unclear. The developmental tasks during this cross-era transition are to terminate or modify adolescent relationships between family, peers, and school, and to initiate and try out new relationships in the adult world. Individuals form a unique place for themselves in the world. Furthermore, the childhood components and self are modified and the self becomes a more individuated adult self that is ready to engage in the responsibilities and satisfactions of adulthood.

These tasks lay the foundations for the Entry Life Structure of the era of Early Adulthood.

3.3.3. Era of Early Adulthood (17 - 45 years)

This era is viewed as the most dramatic of all the eras, and is ushered in by the cross-era transition described above. During the twenties and thirties, the individual peaks physically. This is an era of immense energy and abundance, yet it is also a period of contradiction and stress as the person is driven by inner passions and ambitions while striving to meet the demands of family, society, and occupation.

The individual sets goals, pursues ambitions, works to earn a place in society, find a niche, and strives to become a senior member of the adult world by the end of this era. Important decisions that influence the individual's course of development are made in this period. Decisions regarding career, sexual orientation, long-term relationships, lifestyle, and family are made. However, any of these decisions can cause maladjustment if they are not compatible with, or place too high demands on, the individual and thus are in conflict with the person's needs and desires. Thus the rewards of this era can be enormous but the costs can be equal or greater.

Levinson identified three periods in this era, referred to as: Entry Life Structure for Early Adulthood, Age 30 transition and Culminating Life Structure for Early Adulthood. What follows is a description of each period.

3.3.3.1. Entry Life Structure for Early Adulthood (22 - 28 years)

The primary task in this developmental period is to build and maintain the first adult life structure. Individuals aim to find a place for themselves in the generation of young adults with the aim of enriching their lives. The illusion at this stage is that if the correct choices are made here, the structure will be established for life.

Within each component of life structure work is done, choices are made and existing relationships modified, and new ones established. This may result in the status of components of life structure changing. For example, one or several components may become central in the life structure, others may fade away completely, and still others may fluctuate in relative importance before taking a more stable place at the centre or periphery. Generally, it is during this period that women make choices bringing them closer to decisions regarding marriage, motherhood, family of origin, occupation, and community.

Within this developmental period Levinson further identified a first and second phase with an "Age 25 Shift" signalling the change. The first phase is structure-building: a time in which the Entry Life Structure is created. Key

relationships are formed, and commitments are strengthened. The Age 25 Shift usually involves one or a few major life events. The nature and consequences of the shift are not simply determined by external events, the personal meaning of the events and the life structure in which they occur must also be considered. The Age 25 Shift crystallises the Entry Life Structure and initiates the second phase. The second phase serves to rectify or enhance, and consolidate choices made in the first phase.

3.3.3.2. Age 30 Transition (28 - 33 years)

The major developmental task of this period is that of individuation. In this mid-era transition the individual explores possibilities for a new life structure based on the experience gained.

Most individuals find this period bewildering when they discover that the life they arduously constructed has flaws and is no longer suitable. As a result, moderate to severe developmental difficulties are often experienced in this period. It is a time of questioning and re-evaluation, and provides the opportunity to rectify some of the choices made.

The Age 30 transition is often characterised by a significant turning point in the life course. There may be marker events of great importance or important 'non-events' whose occurrence or non-occurrence has an impact on the individual's life. Examples include promotion, marriage or pregnancy. Thus, as is the case with all transitions, this structure-changing period also involves contradictory tasks.

3.3.3.3. Culminating Life Structure for Early Adulthood (33 - 40 years)

This period can be regarded as a time of settling down. Individuals attempt to create a secure life structure, within the self and society, wherein they can pursue their youthful dreams and goals. This gives the "novice adult" (Levinson 1996, pp. 19 & 142) direction in moving from a junior to a senior member of the adult world. Several individuals experience this period as a time of great difficulty but also of great growth.

As with the developmental period of the Entry Life Structure, Levinson also identified two phases within the Culminating Life Structure, however the two phases are not marked by a noticeable shift.

The first phase involves the developmental task of developing a new life structure after the Age 30 transition. External circumstances may change or remain the same,

however the internal subjective meaning of the life structure is questioned. New goals may need to be set. Although establishing suitable central components and new goals may be difficult it is worth the effort as these are difficult to modify in the second phase. In the second phase, the individual aims to accomplish the goals of Early Adulthood. This is done within the central components but other components are involved. Levinson noted several important gender differences in this second phase. For the purposes of this study only those relevant to women will be discussed.

For women, Levinson calls this second phase *Becoming One's Own Woman*. According to Levinson, whether the woman is motivated and consciously engages in the developmental "tasks" of this phase, or not, makes no difference as he views them as being intrinsic to the nature of the life cycle. In this phase, it is important for the woman that she be affirmed in her own world, that she speak with her own voice, and is recognised in her own right and not as an appendage to any other person. She strives to gain a sense of her own personhood. In other words, she strives to gain independence, to be competent, responsible, and to be taken seriously. The satisfactoriness with which she meets these tasks determines future development and is influenced by her character as well as external circumstances.

The conclusion of the Culminating Life Structure of this era represents the outcome of Early Adulthood, and provides messages about the individual. The most important messages are those related to central components which are carried into Middle Adulthood.

3.3.4. Mid-life Transition (40 - 45 years)

The adaptation in this transition period is that of accepting the end of youth and creating an appropriate balance between youthfulness and ageing. An essential developmental task of this period is that of mid-life "individuation" (Levinson 1996, p. 32). The latter forms the basis from which the modified sense of self and life structure evolve throughout the era of Middle Adulthood. Thus the character of the late thirties gives way to a markedly different character in the mid-forties. As is the case in cross-era transitions, this period is regarded as a developmental bridge from Early Adulthood to Middle Adulthood, and its biopsychosocial character is one of questioning and change. The most commonly asked questions revolve around one's own needs and wants. There is a turning-point at which one's own satisfaction with life counts for more than one's success in the world. However, with the focus on the

self, the individual nevertheless enjoys being a member of family, work, and social groups, and desires to leave a legacy for future generations.

Most individuals experience severe developmental crises during this period, marked by uncertainty and causing anger, sadness or fear. It was Levinson who coined the term "Mid-life Crisis" (Levinson 1996, p. 55) when describing this transition.

The individual, of necessity, seeks a new balance of engagement in and separateness from the world. This transition is the beginning of the passage of Middle Adulthood through which the individual moves from the junior to senior generation.

3.3.5. Era of Middle Adulthood (40 - 65 years)

This is the third era in Levinson's life structure theory. Like the era of Early Adulthood, the era of Middle Adulthood is divided into three periods of development. The first period is one in which the individual creates and maintains a new life structure. The second is an adjustment or transition period, and the third, a period of consolidation. However, this era differs biopsychosocially and emotionally from the era of Early Adulthood, with different internal and external resources and constraints.

Although physiological capacity may decline after Early Adulthood many individuals in this era lead an energetic, socially valuable, and personally satisfying life. Many develop the capacity to be more maturely creative, purposeful, open-minded, as well as having an enhanced capacity for intimacy. According to Levinson (1996), individuals in their 40s and 50s usually become senior members of their own world, unless their "lives are hampered in some special way" (p. 20).

Important tasks for the individual in this era are to accept the self and to value the wisdom gained through insight and past experiences (Bareira, 2001). Generally, drives and tensions are less conflictual in this era, thus enriching the quality of life. This development allows individuals to be responsible not only for their own work but also for the work of others, and to encourage the development of the younger generation. It is in this era that women show a need for personal expression and growth. However, there are individuals who may experience this era as a time of decline, emptiness, and loss of vitality.

As mentioned, the stages of Middle Adulthood are similar to those identified in the era of Early Adulthood. Levinson labelled them: Entry Life Structure for Middle

Adulthood, Age 50 transition and Culminating Life Structure for Middle Adulthood. An outline of each is provided below.

3.3.5.1. Entry Life Structure for Middle Adulthood (45 - 50 years)

As in Early Adulthood, the individual's task is to create a structure from which Middle Adulthood can evolve. This life structure is, however, different to that of Early Adulthood. There are important differences within the relationships that form the central components of the life structure. Furthermore, differences may occur within existing relationships, as well as in the manner in which new relationships are formed. Generally, individuals in this developmental period are psychologically and emotionally more flexible, and are able to invest more in the development of the future generation.

3.3.5.2. Age 50 Transition (50 - 55 years)

This mid-era transition is similar to that of the Age 30 transition. This is a period in which the individual re-appraises, and may modify, the Entry Life Structure. It is also a period wherein the individual further explores self and world with a view to forming a more suitable life structure. Developmental crises are a common occurrence in this period of change. Individuals who have made few significant or unsuitable changes in their life structure in the previous 10 to 15 years are more likely to experience a crisis at this time.

3.3.5.3. Culminating Life Structure for Middle Adulthood (55 - 60 years)

This concluding period is generally a period in which individuals who achieve satisfactoriness attain the dreams and goals of Middle Adulthood. The two phases of the Culminating Life Structure also occur in Middle Adulthood. The concluding phase is experienced as a time of rich satisfactions and bitter disappointments, as individuals discover that the era has given more, and less, than anticipated.

3.3.6. Late Adult Transition (60 - 65 years)

This profound period of transition marks the end of the era of Middle Adulthood and the beginning of the fourth and final era, that of Late Adulthood. Levinson et al. (1978) speculate about this latter period of the life cycle. It appears that gerontology has provided considerable information, though little understanding, about this time of

life. What is known is that there are several developmental tasks in this period and the next. One of these tasks is that the individual evaluates the past and prepares for the shift into the last era of the life cycle. In this task, the individual aims to sustain youthfulness in a new form appropriate to Late Adulthood.

According to Levinson et al. (1978) all individuals have a sense of utter despair at some time during the period of Late Adult transition. This has its basis in actuality as well as in irrational self-accusation. There is the sense that life has been of no value to self or others.

3.3.7. Era of Late Adulthood (65 years - death)

Late Adulthood, too, is an era of decline as well as opportunity for development. Death and serious illness among loved ones becomes more frequent. Despite good health and physical activity, there are reminders of decreasing vigour and capacity in the form of aches and pains or major illness or impairment. Such physical, psychological and social changes, which occur during this era, necessitate various changes in lifestyle, and life structure.

Moving out of centre stage can be traumatic. The individual receives less recognition and has less authority and power. Within the family, the individual is part of the 'grandparent generation', and can at best be modestly helpful to grown offspring and a source of indulgence to grandchildren (Levinson, et al. 1978). Should the individual retain power well into Late Adulthood, there is a tendency to be an isolated leader, in poor touch with followers and overly idealised.

Thus one of the developmental tasks in this era is to establish a new sense of self. The socio-cultural and economic context also impacts development in this era significantly, and certain key choices are made. These choices form the basis upon which a life structure is formed within which the individual's values and goals are pursued.

Another developmental task of Late Adulthood is to find a new balance of involvement with society and with self. Ideally, the individual is in a stage where valued work can be engaged in, but this work now stems more from one's own creative energies than from external pressure. Many choose to contribute to society through community involvement. By so doing the individual creates a new sense of self, as well as a sense of involvement and belonging. Other individuals realise their potential through art or intellectual works.

Levinson (1996) also speculates and hypothesises about a period of life that extends past 80 years. He terms this period Late Late Adulthood. Here the process of ageing is much more evident than the process of growth. The life structure usually contains only a small territory, a few significant relationships, and a preoccupation with immediate bodily needs and personal comforts. To Levinson et al. (1978) development at the end of the life cycle is the coming to terms with the process of dying and preparing for death.

Conclusion

Levinson's life structure theory and his views on adult development were introduced in this chapter. Key constructs were defined, and the four eras and their developmental and transitional periods described. It can be seen that, although the potential for positive growth exists in adulthood, it is less assured than in childhood and takes different forms. The biopsychosocial character of each developmental era illustrates that adult lives are a story of interwoven growth and decline.

Chapter Four and Five deal with methodological aspects of this study and Chapter Six undertakes a description and exploration of Keller's unique life structure. The latter is then compared with Levinson's theory in Chapter Seven. In such a way, similarities and differences are noted, the uniqueness of the subject's life is highlighted, and the theory examined.

CHAPTER FOUR

ETHICAL AND PRELIMINARY METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter consists of two parts. The first part discusses the ethical considerations of conducting a psychobiographical research study and how these are addressed. The second part deals with preliminary methodological considerations and their application to this study of Keller.

4.1. Ethical Considerations

In conducting a psychobiographical study, the researcher is required to consider and address a number of ethical issues. Primary issues include the invasion of privacy and potential embarrassment or harm to the subject and the individual's relatives and associates (Runyan, 1982a), as well as the matter of informed consent. These ethical issues have a direct influence on the psychobiographical subject selected, the sources of data used, and the information disseminated.

As Elms (1994) points out, the question arises as to whether the research should be conducted on living people or only on those whose lives have been completed. Furthermore, the type and source of data that may be included must be given careful consideration. For example, can archival materials alone be used, or would it be permissible to use all kinds of available data, or only what the family views as suitable? Regarding the publication and dissemination of the research findings, consideration must be given as to what goes to print, whether the publication is to be a diplomatic, but honestly phrased presentation, or only what the family of the subject would approve of.

Due to an apparent shortage of ethical guidelines pertaining to psychobiographical research, those set out by the American Psychiatric Association in 1976 are still adhered to today. These are set out by Elms (1994) as follows:

- Psychiobiographies should ideally be conducted on deceased persons, who are preferably long-dead and should have no close surviving relatives who might be embarrassed by unsavoury revelations.
- Psychiobiographies may only be done on living persons who have freely consented to being studied, interviewed, and written up for publication.

As the aforementioned guidelines make no specific reference to confidentiality, Elms (1994) recommends that all intimate knowledge obtained by the

psychobiographer should be treated and documented with respect. Although Jacobs (2004) points out that "Elms stated that he is of the opinion that psychobiographers should have as much right as journalists do to write about subjects both living and dead" (p. 93), Elms (1994) nevertheless also indicated that every psychobiography should, to some degree, be ethically justified.

Each of these ethical issues are addressed in this psychobiographical study of Keller. With regard to violation of privacy and confidentiality, only published data were utilised in this research study. The knowledge obtained was treated and documented with respect and empathy, thereby upholding the ethical guidelines for psychological research. Furthermore, careful consideration was given to the information that is disseminated by this research.

In addressing the ethical consideration of informed consent, it is the researcher's belief that neither Keller (if she were still alive) nor any surviving relatives would be harmed by, or object to, such a study. The researcher bases this belief on several factors. Firstly, Keller wrote autobiographies (*Story of my Life*, *The World I Live in*, *Mid-stream: My Later Life* and *Journal*) as she was aware that it was what people wanted to read about. Secondly, her lecture tours were for the purpose of sharing her experiences and educating the public with regards to people with disabilities, hers in particular. Thirdly, as is reflected in the following quote it was Keller's wish that the public understand the needs and desires of handicapped people.

> The public must learn that the blind man is neither genius nor a freak nor an
>
> idiot. He has a mind that can be educated, a hand which can be trained, and
>
> ambitions which it is right for him to strive to realise, and it is the duty of the
>
> public to help him make the best of himself so that he can win light through
>
> work. (Herman, 2007, p. 271; RNIB, 1995-2008, p. 5)

4.2. Preliminary Methodological Considerations

In the 1980s Elms (1988) and Runyan (1988a) pointed out that psychobiographical studies had been criticised for transgressions in the disciplines of history and scientific psychology. Many of these criticisms continue to plague this genre of psychological research as discussed below. However psychobiographical researchers acknowledge them and thus they are addressed in terms of preliminary methodological

considerations. These criticisms include validity and reliability, researcher bias, reductionism, and cross-cultural difficulties, amongst others.

Strategies that can be taken to avoid, or at least minimise, the possibility of transgressions, and how these were applied in the study of Keller are discussed after each criticism.

4.2.1. Researcher Bias

The psychobiographical method facilitates a relationship, of some form, between the researcher and the subject. The researcher may develop intense personal reactions toward the subject - counter-transference type reactions (Anderson, 1981b) - due to the lengthy in-depth nature of psychobiographical research methodology. As a result, the possibility of idealising or degrading the subject of the study is one of the greatest threats to this form of research (Anderson, 1981b; Elms, 1988).

Following Anderson's (1981a; 1981b) suggestions the following steps were taken in an attempt to minimise researcher bias in the study.

- A record of the psychobiographer's feelings as related to the biographical subject, Keller, was kept. This was done in order to examine how these feelings influenced the researcher's bias, and how the researcher chose to write about the subject.

- In order to safeguard against the possible tendency to be disparaging toward the subject, the researcher made every effort to develop empathic understanding. This was largely facilitated through internet research using a variety of sites such as those of The National Institute for the Deaf[2], and The Shepherd's Centre[3], consulting blind people at institutions such as Retina South Africa and Nkosinathi Foundation for the Blind, as well as drawing on the researcher's own experiences as a visually impaired person.

- Researcher triangulation was employed. This was done in the form of individual consultation with other psychobiographical specialists to gain objective commentary on the relationship and difficulties and possible biases. In addition, diverse data sources (for example, an autobiography written by Keller, biographies on Keller, letters written by Keller and her teacher, as well

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[2]   Available from http://www.deafnet.co.za/

[3]   Available from http://www. shepherdcentre.com.au/

as a biography written by Keller on her teacher) were consulted in an attempt to gain a variety of viewpoints on the subject. (See also section 1.3.).

4.2.2. Reductionism

Various forms of reductionistic criticism exist, these include:

- Psychobiographies are said not to give sufficient consideration to the complex social, historical and cultural context within which the subject existed. Furthermore, the application of a formal psychological theory to the life of a historical figure is criticised for not allowing sufficient analysis (Runyan, 1988b).

- Psychobiographical studies are said to focus only on pathological processes rather than exploring patterns of normal, healthy development (Runyan, 1988b).

- It is said that the behaviour and character of adults are explained predominantly in terms of early childhood experiences, neglecting later formative influences (Runyan, 1988b).

In order to minimise the possibility of reductionism, the following precautionary measures were employed.

- As suggested by Anderson (1981b) and Howe (1997), subjects should be regarded in their holistic complexity. The researcher strove to achieve this by integrating Keller's lifespan development into her biopsychosocial and historical context.

- Multiple sources of data documenting Keller's development, education, social, political, and spiritual involvement were utilised with the aim of minimising the criticism of reductionism.

- The researcher made every attempt to avoid the excessive use of "esoteric psychological jargon" (Runyan, 1988b).

- Regarding the criticism of pathologising the subject, the aim of the researcher's approach was eugraphic rather than pathographic (Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005a). In other words, although Keller was selected due to her profound sight and hearing handicaps, the aim of the study was to uncover 'normal' patterns of development that Keller may have undergone in her life development.

- In this study, both Keller's adult and childhood experiences and development are explored. Thus Levinson's (1996) theory of life structure development was employed.

4.2.3. Cross-cultural Differences

The psychological concepts and theories used in psychobiographical research are not necessarily applicable to the subject under study and may not be cross-culturally sensitive (Anderson, 1981a). In order to reduce the impact of this criticism, the following two steps, suggested by Anderson (1981a), were taken:

- The researcher acknowledges and kept in mind throughout the study that the context, and hence the culture in which Keller lived, differs significantly from present-day culture. However, it should be noted here that the barriers Keller faced, particularly in tertiary educational institutions, still exist in the South African context more than a century later. For example, the availability of academic texts in Braille and advanced planning for examinations remain rare.
- The researcher engaged in extensive and in-depth historical research to develop a culturally empathic understanding of Keller. This research included investigating technology available for the deaf-blind, gender roles, as well as socio-political circumstances at the various developmental stages of Keller's life. As Kelly (2006b) state, "[empathy] can legitimately use the range of resources at the researcher's disposal, including an understanding of history, theory, society, language, politics…" (p. 349).

4.2.4. Analysing an Absent Subject

This criticism of psychobiographical research is based on the opinion that the lack of direct contact with the subject diminishes the amount of available information, as would be the case in an interview or consultation.

It appears that this criticism is based on the original understanding of psychobiographical research as 'applied psychoanalysis'. The psychobiographer however has alternatives, as argued by Anderson (1981a), and these were employed in the following ways.

- The researcher drew on a number of different viewpoints from various authors, biographers and other commentators.
- Events were analysed in light of their eventual effects.

- The researcher endeavoured, and was able, to offer a balanced description, as there was no need to engage in therapeutic considerations.

Furthermore, in Ricoeur's (1979) "Model of the text" he speaks of "distandation" (cited in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993, p. 26). He argues that, no matter how thoroughly we understand a context from within, there are certain things about the context that only become evident when viewed from the outside.

4.2.5. Validity and Reliability Criticisms

As is the case with most qualitative research, criticism of the validity and reliability of the research design and method proliferate. This is largely due to the lack of controls in the case study approach and its limited ability to generalise (Runyan, 1988b).

The quality of a case study design, however, can be measured by four measures common to all social science methods (Aiken, 2002; Neuman, 2006; Yin, 2003). These measures are construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Construct validity relates to establishing the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied. Internal validity relates to showing how certain conditions lead to other conditions, establishing a causal relationship. External validity refers to establishing the domain to which a study's findings may be generalised. The ability to replicate the study under similar conditions is referred to as reliability. Strategies employed to address these tests are discussed below.

- Yin (2003) advocates that careful selection and conceptualisation of the constructs and variables of the study can achieve construct validity. These must, however, be in keeping with the original objectives of the study. The researcher is of the opinion that construct validity was achieved by clearly conceptualising the stages and developmental tasks related to Levinson's (1996) life structure theory (see Chapter Three). In particular, the constructs of life structure development, developmental eras, and life structure components were the focus. These were employed to investigate the aim of the study. That is, to establish whether Keller, as a handicapped person, underwent universal patterns of adult development as proposed by Levinson (1996).

- As already indicated, multiple sources of data were utilised to increase the internal validity of the study by allowing for cross-referencing (Yin, 2003). In other words, structural corroboration was attained and credibility enhanced.

- In the case of psychobiographical research the researcher engages in analytical generalisation as opposed to statistical generalisation (Yin, 2003). In this study, Keller's life development was analysed and compared, or generalised, to Levinson's (1996) life structure theory as opposed to generalising the findings to a statistical population. In this way external validity was ensured.

- While collecting the raw biographical information, a coding scheme was developed (Delport & de Vos, 2005; Kelly, 2006a). This coding scheme indicated autobiographical or biographical sources, the relationship of the author to Keller, and the stages of her life structure development. Furthermore, clear, concise records of the data collected were kept. The aim was to facilitate replication of the findings under similar circumstances to achieve reliability.

4.2.6. Elitism and the Easy Genre

This criticism is based on the belief that psychobiographical research is directed toward the socially elite, such as kings, queens, political leaders, and the privileged. Runyan (1988b) points out that it is the level of aggregation, rather than social class that should be the issue under consideration.

Furthermore, Runyan (1988b) argues against the criticism that psychobiographical research is an easy genre. He argues that it is possible to write a superficial psychobiography in a short amount of time with minimal effort. However, a good psychobiography requires in-depth consultation with multiple sources, sound psychological knowledge, extensive knowledge of the subject's socio-historical context, and good literary skill. The researcher addressed this concern in the study of Keller and, as has been pointed out several times, a diverse variety of sources was consulted.

In a rebuff of the criticism of elitism, it is clear that Keller, although well known and acquainted with a variety of famous individuals, could not be considered a member of the social elite. Her father suffered severe financial hardship to provide Keller with a tutor and an education, and later Keller was dependent on sponsorships

to supplement her at times meagre earnings. Her status is due to her extraordinary achievements and the attention they attracted, and not to her social class.

4.2.7. Infinite Amount of Biographical Data

There is often an infinite amount of biographical data available to psychobiographical researchers. It thus becomes necessary to approach the material in a systematic manner to make it more manageable. The following strategies were employed to deal with the large amount of data, and their application in this study is illustrated in Chapter Five.

- Miles and Huberman's (1994) processes of condensation and data display were major guidelines in reducing the vast amount of information available on Keller's life.

- The 'split half' approach was utilised. This approach involves the division of the information into two halves. The first part is used to identify theoretical propositions and constructs, while the second part of the material is examined in order to compare it to, and test it against, the theoretical propositions identified in the first body of material. This is to determine whether both halves render the same results (Anderson, 1981b; Neuman, 2006). Aspects considered by the researcher to constitute Keller's biopsychosocial development were identified in the first part, and verified using the second half of the data. Should discrepancies have arisen, additional sources of data would have been consulted. In such a manner, the infinite amount of biographical data was dealt with.

- Alexander's (1990) method of questioning the data was also utilised. An example question is: 'Which section of the data will allow for the exploration and description of human development as reflected in Keller's life story?' This provided guidelines to identify and assess particular categories of data pertinent to this study.

4.2.8 Inflated Expectations

This criticism is based on the attitude of those psychobiographical researchers who suggest that a wide variety of issues are solved by psychobiographical studies (Anderson 1981b). The researcher is aware of the short-comings of this approach,

and acknowledges that this study on Keller was conducted primarily from a psychological perspective.

Furthermore, psychological explanations are tentative and add to and do not replace other explanations. Thus the researcher recognises that this approach aims to, but cannot fully explain, the complexity of an extraordinarily courageous and tenacious person such as Keller.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the ethical and preliminary methodological considerations based on criticisms of the psychobiographical approach to research. In Chapter Five, the research method is set out and procedures of data collection and analysis are expanded on.

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this chapter is the research methodology employed in this study. The methodological considerations as well as ethical considerations pertinent to such a research method have been discussed in Chapter Four. In this chapter, the objectives of the study are first introduced, and then the research design and psychobiographical subject presented. Thereafter the procedures of data collection and data analysis are described in detail.

5.1. Research Objectives

Psychobiographical research is exploratory-descriptive in nature. As such, the primary objective of this study is to explore and describe the life of a handicapped person in relation to Levinson's (1996) formal psychological theory of life structure development. This is done to establish whether the life structure development of a handicapped person displays the so-called 'universal patterns of development' described by Levinson (1996). The aim then is to provide a fuller, more cohesive picture of Keller's life in its holistic complexity. It is hoped that in this way insight will be gained into the stages at which she made her choices, changes, and contributions to the spheres of life she engaged in.

The secondary objective of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of Keller's life structure development within her socio-historic context to reveal her unique life structure as well as the presence or absence of universal patterns. The latter then facilitates a "descriptive dialogic" approach (Edwards, 1990, p. 19), in which Levinson's (1996) theory of adult development is examined. In other words, a 'dialogue' between the exploratory-descriptive aspect of the research and the conceptualisations and theoretical suppositions of Levinson's theory are encouraged (Green, 2006). This in turn allows aspects of Keller's life that contributed to her extraordinary accomplishments to be revealed.

5.2. Research Design

The design employed to achieve the aforementioned objectives is situated within the qualitative paradigm. A single case interpretative research method (Schultz, 2001; Yin, 2003) was utilised. Elms (1994) refers to this approach as a morphogenic

research method, in which the subject's characteristics are highlighted in a holistic manner rather than in terms of isolated events. That is to say that the emphasis is on the uniqueness of the whole person rather than on single elements (Runyan, 1982a). This study attempts to reconstruct Keller's life into an illuminating story through the application of a formal psychological theory (Schultz, 2001, 2005a). Thus this study aims to provide a holistic description of Keller within her socio-historic context.

5.3. The Psychobiographical Subject

In psychobiographical research, the choice of subject is usually related to significant, famous, enigmatic or paradigmatic figures or their interesting qualities (Howe, 1997; McAdams, 1988). Furthermore, the study of 'greatness' is applicable to psychology since the development of extraordinarily competent or creative individuals in society is investigated (Howe, 1997).

The subject of this study was selected by the purposive sampling method (Durrheim & Painter, 2006). As Delport and de Vos (2005) point out, the subject may be selected on the basis of the individual's characteristics, and the interest the subject generates in the researcher.

Keller's life story is well known, inspirational, significant and well documented. This, together with her long and completed life, and her handicaps mean that she meets the criteria for a psychobiographical subject, as well as generating researcher interest.

Although many autobiographies and biographies on Keller's life and accomplishments have been published, there have been no known psychobiographies published to date. This paper is intended to add to the body of psychobiographical research in South Africa. Finally, the study of Keller's life development could serve to confirm or refute aspects of Levinson's (1996) theory of life structure development.

5.4. Data Collection Method

In collecting data for a psychobiographical study, it must be borne in mind that written and published materials may be subject to author bias. This occurs when an author reports information in a biased fashion and thereby compromises the credibility of the material. As discussed in Chapter Four, author bias can be overcome by data triangulation. In social research, data triangulation is one form of triangulation. Triangulation is the use of different types of measures, or data

collection techniques, to examine the same variable (Neuman, 2006). In this study, information was corroborated through the use of multiple sources of data (Yin, 2003) with differing perspectives as discussed in section 1.3.

Yin (2003) further states that multiple sources of data, allowing for cross-referencing of biographical information, are considered to enhance the internal validity of the information collected. Both 'primary data' (documents produced by the subject) (Neuman, 2006) and 'secondary data' (documents produced by others) (Neuman, 2006) were utilised in the study of Keller's life development. The primary sources of data used for this study were an autobiography titled *The Story of my Life* (Berger, 2004), a biography, *Teacher, Anne Sullivan Macy: A Tribute by the Foster-Child of her Mind* (Keller, 1956) and an essay titled *Optimism* (Keller, 1903). Secondary data sources include biographies titled *Helen Keller: A Life* (Herrmann, 2007), *Helen Keller* (Davis, 2003), and *Blind Rage: Letters to Helen Keller* (Kleege, 2006). Additional sources of data used to corroborate autobiographical information were historical texts, newspaper and journal articles, and archive resources from the websites of the American Foundation for the Blind and Royal National Institute for the Blind.

The use of published data has several advantages and these include the fact that: stable sources of data can be viewed as needed; the spelling of names, dates, and titles of names can be cross-checked and verified; information from other sources can be corroborated; information is relatively accessible; and this information is convenient for the researcher to access as needed according to his or her own time frame (Green, 2006).

Conducting a psychobiographical research study poses the challenge of examining, extracting, and analysing the vast amount of available material on the subject (Alexander, 1988; McAdams, 1994). The selection of sources used was made on the basis of available published material, variety of authors, and reliability of the source.

5.5. Data Analysis Procedure

As the analysis of case study data is a process of examining, extracting, categorising, and compiling information regarding the subject (Yin, 2003), Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach served as the main guide to extracting and organising the biopsychosocial data of Keller's life. In addition, the analysis and interpretation of the data were guided by the focus and theoretical constructs of Levinson's (1996)

life structure theory. The three processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman 1994) were utilised concurrently throughout the research process, as qualitative data analysis is iterative and continuous.

- Data reduction (condensation). This process was achieved through the selection of a conceptual framework that guided the researcher in the extraction of information. The reduction of data collected was necessary to sort relevant from irrelevant material to then organise and display the data, and draw final conclusions. The life structure theory of development by Levinson (1996) provided the conceptual framework for this research study. As such the eras of development provided the framework for the focus on Keller's development. During the process of data reduction, the first half of Anderson's (1981b) split half approach (see section 4.2.7.) was employed to examine the data. This was to allow patterns in Keller's development to emerge from the data rather than rigidly applying those proposed by Levinson (1996). The second half of the material served to verify the information identified in the first part.

- Data display. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest the use of matrices or charts as a means of data display, making the information to be analysed more accessible and concise. Data deemed to be relevant were displayed using a matrix of Levinson's four eras of development (see Table 5.1 below). In selecting this data, Alexander's (1990) strategy of questioning the data (see section 4.2.7.) was utilised. The question, 'Which data allows for the exploration and description of development in Keller's life?' was contemplated.

    Furthermore, Levinson's three components of life structure (see Box 5.1 below) were employed to highlight certain aspects of Keller's life. As well as making the information more accessible, the process of data display aided in the condensation and understanding of the data. In addition, the identification of Keller's developmental patterns and unique life structure were facilitated. Thus, while selecting the data to be displayed, the researcher could simultaneously engage in the processes of data reduction and data analysis.

Table 5.1.

Levinson's (1996) Periods in the Eras of Development

Era of Pre-adulthood		Era of Early Adulthood		Era of Middle Adulthood		Era of Late Adulthood	
Infancy	Birth-2	Early adult transition	17-22	Mid-life transition	40-45	Late adult transition	60-65
Early childhood	2-6	Entry life structure for early adulthood	22-28	Entry life structure for middle adulthood	45-50	Late adulthood	65-death
Middle childhood	6-12	Age 30 transition	28-33	Age 50 transition	50-55		
Adolescence	12-17	Culminating life structure for early adulthood	33-40	Culminating life structure for middle adulthood	55-60		

Box 5.1.

Components of Life Structure

Levinson's (1996) three components of life structure are: central components, peripheral components, and unfilled components.

- Central components are those that are most significant to the individual. The most time and energy are invested in these aspects of life, such as family or career, and they influence the other components.

- Peripheral components are those that can be changed or eliminated more easily and have little influence on other components if change occurs. Less time and energy are invested in these aspects.

- Unfilled components are important to the individual. They are things the person wants but has not managed to attain. Their absence impacts on development.

- Conclusion drawing and verification. It was kept in mind that, although assumptions and conclusion drawing can begin at the start of data collection, the researcher should attempt to keep an open attitude throughout the research process (Green, 2006). Furthermore, conclusion drawing is only part of the

process, as the conclusions must be verified to ensure the validity of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During this study of Keller, as the first two processes were engaged in, propositions arose. However, the researcher endeavoured to avoid premature conclusion drawing, and verification was sought where discrepancies appeared to exist. The conclusions drawn were made within the framework of Levinson's life structure theory. The theoretical propositions and constructs identified and verified using the split half approach (described in section 4.2.7.) were then compared to Levinson's (1996) theoretical propositions to confirm or refute them. Finally, critical feedback from the research supervisor supported the researcher's aim to achieve unbiased interpretation and to increase the reliability of the findings.

Conclusion

The objectives of this study were introduced in this chapter. The research design as well as the means of selection of the psychobiographical subject were presented. Thereafter a detailed description of the data collection and data analysis procedures were provided.

Chapter Six sets out the data collected on Keller's life using the eras of Levinson's life structure theory. A discussion of the findings is presented in Chapter Seven once the data analysis has been conducted.

CHAPTER SIX
DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS

This chapter constitutes a condensed biography of Keller, with the focus on the biopsychosocial aspects of her life. Her lifespan is divided into periods that approximate, yet are not bound by, Levinson's (1996) eras of development. The developmental periods within each era are differentiated by events that the researcher considers to be significant. These events were either physical, social or psychological. The data reflected in this chapter were drawn from a variety of primary and secondary sources as listed in sections 1.3. and 5.4.

6.1. Era of Pre-adulthood

As is well known, the period of childhood is the basis for development, however the focus of this treatise is on Keller's continued development throughout her lifespan. Therefore, although rich in detail, well documented and fascinating, her childhood is relatively briefly outlined with more emphasis on her adult life.

6.1.1. Birth - 19 months

Keller was born Helen Adams Keller, on 27 June 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama in the United States of America. She was the first child from her father's second marriage (Herrmann, 2007). Keller's father, Captain Arthur Keller, is reported to have been a lawyer before joining the army in the American Civil War. After the war he was the owner of a cotton plantation and the editor of a newspaper. Reports of his exact occupation vary slightly. Keller's mother, Kate, was 20 years younger than her husband. It is recorded that she came from respectable, wealthy ancestry. Keller had two older half-brothers, James and William, and two younger siblings: a sister, Mildred, and a brother, Phillips (Herrmann, 2007).

Keller was a healthy baby and is said to have been the joy of her mother's life (Herrmann, 2007). However, at the age of 19 months Keller became severely ill with doctors fearing for her life. The illness, unknown to this day (recorded as 'stomach fever'), left Keller blind and deaf and clinging to her mother's skirts.

6.1.2. Age 20 months - 6 years

Keller herself (Berger, 2004; Keller, 1956) refers to these years as 'Phantom years'. After her illness, the engaging, responsive little girl became mute and frustrated. Her mother was heartbroken and neither parents had the heart to discipline Keller. As a result, she ate with her hands, grabbed food out of the plates of others and showed little affection. It appears that Keller's angry, frustrated outbursts of kicking, screaming and pinching far outweighed any affection she might have shown. Her face is reported to have been chillingly empty (Herrmann, 2007) showing no expression of personality.

She was aware that people communicated with their lips but could make no sense of this. Although she describes her existence during this period as a "phantom in a world of nothingness" (Keller, 1956, p. 5) and many thought she had no mind, Keller was a developing child. She is described as having been physically strong, taller than most children her age, and mobile. In addition, she learned to fold the laundry and recognise her clothes by touch. She could also crudely express her needs with gestures and developed signs for significant people in her life.

6.1.3. Age 7 - 14 years

In 1886, Keller was taken by her father to meet Alexander Graham Bell in search of pedagogic help for her. Bell recommended that the Perkins School for the Blind be contacted. As a result, in 1887, shortly before Keller's seventh birthday, Anne Sullivan (Miss S) was employed to 'teach' Keller.

Miss S found Keller to be nothing like she expected. She wrote to a friend that there was nothing pale or delicate about Keller. She described Keller as being large, strong and ruddy, and unrestrained in her movements, having a large mouth which rarely smiled (Berger, 2004; Herrmann, 2007). Furthermore, Miss S reported Keller to have a restless spirit and be quick tempered, very active, intelligent, and able to learn fast (Berger, 2004; Herrmann, 2007). She also described Keller at this early stage as possessing strength of will and endurance (Berger, 2004).

However, when Miss S, who was to be her tutor and companion for the next 50 years, broke through the barriers of Keller's handicap much about Keller changed. She quickly learned language by means of a finger alphabet that was spelled onto the palm of her hand, as well as by embossed print and writing on a slate. Later Keller learned to 'lip read' by gently holding her fingers over the speaker's lips, jaw and

throat.   Miss S's fingers on her palm were described to be 'like life itself', a way out of her isolation. Keller later referred to this period as 'the birth of her soul' (Berger, 2004; Herrmann, 2007). Amongst other forms of play, Keller also learned to hop and skip. The "phantom was being metamorphosed into Helen" (Herrmann, 2007, p. 15). She became less violent and was able to express many more emotions. This rapid development however came at a price and it has been recorded that at the age of eight years Keller suffered from nervous and physical exhaustion (Herrmann, 2007).

Miss S was an ambitious, driven woman prone to mood swings, who strove for perfection. Although these qualities were largely responsible for Keller's success, they also resulted in her being subjected to insults, abuse and feelings of guilt for failing her teacher (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

At the age of eight, Keller and Miss S left home for Boston. There Miss S continued Keller's tutelage at the Perkins School for the Blind. At the age of nine Keller resolved to learn to speak vocally. Early in the process she believed that she had learned to speak. Unfortunately, to her disappointment, this was a task she never quite mastered. By the age of 10, she was famous in the United States of America (USA), she was raising funds for the education of a deaf-blind boy, Tommy Stringer, and she was exploring the concepts of religion and God. Keller's many other developments and achievements surpassed any earlier attempts to teach the deaf-blind. As a result, Keller and Miss S were either revered as miracle workers or damned as frauds (Berger, 2004; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

Keller had an exceptional memory and concentration. One of her great achievements was her use of language and her exceptional writing ability. At the age of 11 she wrote a story, *The Frost King,* for the principal of the Perkins school for the Blind, Mr Anagnos. He was so impressed that he had it printed. However, the story closely resembled an existing published children's story and Keller was accused of plagiarism. A full investigation was launched and Keller was interrogated. She was found not guilty. However, the ordeal left her feeling miserable and questioning whether she, her thoughts and her ideas were original (Berger, 2004). As a result of this incident, many arguments raged regarding the way in which children learn through imitation and assimilation (Berger, 2004; Keller, 1956).

In an attempt to help Keller regain her confidence in writing, Miss S encouraged her to write a story of her life thus far and, at the age of 13, Keller's first story about her experiences as a deaf-blind child was published in a youth magazine. People,

however, questioned how much of Keller's writing was her own and how much of it was that of Miss S, thus initiating the idea of Keller being a '"collaborative personality" (Berger, 2004, p. xxiii).

6.1.4. Age 15 - 20 years

At the age of 14, after an unhappy departure from Perkins, Keller and Miss S relocated to New York City.   There Keller attended the Wright-Humason School for the Deaf in her pursuit of spoken language (American Foundation for the Blind, 1885-1980).

At 15 years of age, Keller was physically well developed, attractive, intelligent and photogenic (Herrmann, 2007). However she was described as being childlike and naïve in her attitudes (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). This was attributed to her being isolated from certain information which was filtered by Miss S. Throughout her life, and at this time in particular, her mother and Miss S strove to keep Keller pure and virtuous, as was expected from the handicapped in the late Victorian era. Any opportunity for contact with young men of her age was prevented. Although Keller was deaf-blind and had an 'angelic' public image, her biological development appears to have been 'normal'. However, her emotional and psychological adolescent development are not well documented and it is unknown how she experienced this period of her life (Davis, 2003). What is known is that during this time, Keller was already thinking of providing for Miss S's financial needs, attending high society functions and enlisting funds from wealthy philanthropists (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

Keller's father passed away in 1896. For the first time, Miss S realised that Keller was capable of feeling and expressing powerful emotions when she saw Keller's stricken face and heard her sobbing (Herrmann, 2007). Her mother, Kate, refused to allow her to attend her father's funeral saying she would not cope with the heat. Keller felt that her family refused to let her share their grief, and she felt more lonely and isolated than ever. Furthermore it is reported that Keller was never appropriated her share of the estate (Herrmann, 2007).

During this period, Keller was introduced to the 'religion' of Swedenborgianism. It made a great impact on her and seemed to be the only solace at the time of her father's death. Later in her life she wrote two books on the meaning of religion.

Although Keller had attended the Perkins School for the Blind, she was not regarded as a regular pupil and her tutelage was solely undertaken by Miss S. It was at the age of 15 that Keller made the decision that she wanted to attend Harvard University and "compete with the sighted and hearing" (Keller, 1956, p. 36). At the time Harvard was exclusively for males. However the annexe of Harvard, Radcliffe College, allowed for the higher education of women. For Keller to gain entry to Radcliffe, it was necessary for her to attend Cambridge School for Young Ladies in Cambridge, Massachusetts. For the first time Keller had to learn in a classroom and was exposed to sighted girls of her own age. Although she initially reported enjoying the contact, she felt more alone than ever before as she became aware of the communication gap and her limitations in interactions. Keller (1956) admits that she was determined, stubborn and rebellious. These characteristics were likely contributors to her near burnout, as well as to her success. Despite several disruptions in Keller's schooling, she attained the required qualification and was accepted at Radcliffe College in 1900, at the age of twenty.

6.2. Era of Early Adulthood

This era of Keller's life was dominated by her loss of childlike naïvety. Her education at Radcliffe College and her introduction to the world of economics and politics broadened her knowledge considerably. Another dominant theme in this era was romance where two noteworthy relationships occurred.

6.2.1. Age 21 - 24 years

Keller was the first deaf-blind person to enrol at Radcliffe and here the difficulties she had encountered at school were multiplied. Furthermore, she was aware that she could not participate in social events as, apart from her communication barriers, her studies took up all her time. She wrote that she became rebellious against time but that she was willing to sacrifice in order to achieve (Berger, 2004).

Despite Miss S's attempts to filter information from Keller, it was inevitable that she would learn some of the 'cruel' facts about the world through her studies. Through this she formed her own opinions which in turn resulted in her becoming an activist. In an article published in 1912 Keller noted: "my investigation of blindness led me into the industrial world. And what a world it is! How different from the world of my beliefs! ... How to reconcile this world of fact with the bright world of my

imagining?" (cited in Davis, 2003, p. 47). In her essay, *Optimism,* written in 1903 she appears to have been in the throes of discovering a means of reconciliation.

A lecturer in English language encouraged Keller's self-expression and, at the age of 21, she decided to write about her own observations and thoughts (Berger, 2004; Herrmann, 2007). This, together with her broadening political, economic and socialist horizons, led her to write about several socially forbidden and controversial issues. For example, she wrote about the link between congenital blindness and venereal disease and advocated a scientific approach to the study of the causation and prevention of disability. Over the next two decades, she produced several books and numerous letters and articles (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007). However, this aspect of Keller's life was a source of embarrassment to her family and those who stood to benefit from her fame, and for her benefactors (Davis, 2003; Kleege, 2006).

In addition to these writings and her studies, Miss S encouraged her to contract to write "The Story of my Life" in serialised form in The Ladies' Home Journal. These articles were published in book form in 1903. As a result of the immense volume of work, both Miss S and Keller's health deteriorated to the point of near burnout. Keller, however, obtained her Bachelor of Arts Degree cum laude and graduated the day after her twenty-fourth birthday (American Foundation for the Blind, 1885-1980; Herrmann, 2007). Despite Miss S's separation from Keller and the stringent measures set in place during Keller's examinations, many found her achievements hard to believe. The ambivalence of the public toward the handicapped continued throughout Keller's life. Keller reported that "a bad bout of the nerves chased her up hill and down dale for many months" after graduating (Keller, 1956, p. 73). At this time she and Miss S moved to their first home of their own in Wrentham, Massachusetts (American Foundation for the Blind, 1885 – 1980; Herrmann, 2007).

During her years at Radcliffe, a man by the name of John Macy entered her life with the purpose of editing her story. He was an avid socialist and once again the question arose as to whether it was Keller herself or Macy who drove her or used her as a mouth piece. Macy was three years older than Keller and 11 years younger than Miss S. Much speculation surrounded (and still surrounds) the relationships between these three people (Herrmann, 2007; Kleege, 2006).

6.2.2. Age 25 - 28 years

Miss S and Macy married in 1905, yet Keller remained an integral part of their lives. Their marriage led to people questioning whether Keller would consider marriage. As mentioned, Miss S and Keller's mother disapproved of the notion. Reports on Keller's view of the matter indicate that Keller may have wished to marry, yet considered herself too much of an encumbrance to do so (Herrmann, 2007). In the sources consulted (see sections 1.3. and 5.4.), not much is documented about this period. It appears that the focus was on speculation about the trio. What is evident is that Keller increased her knowledge of socialism. She read whatever journal articles and books she could obtain in 'raised print' in a variety of languages, and those that were not accessible to her she had read to her by others. She also wrote several articles on her views and became an outspoken activist for social rights (Davis, 2003). In 1906 the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind appointed Keller to their committee where she had the opportunity to address the social issues regarding blindness.

Numerous writers throughout time have expressed similar opinions about Keller's activism. They believe that socialism provided her with an acceptable outlet for the rage and anger that she seldom expressed about the fate that left her helpless and disabled (Herrmann, 2007). However, Keller believed that all sight was of the soul (Keller, 1956), and she retaliated against pity and criticism. In her 1903 essay titled *Optimism* she expressed defiance at pity that was often showered on her. In 1908 *The World I Live in* was published. In this book, Keller mischievously addressed the criticism she had received for using words of colour to describe things.

Due to Keller's association with men of the older generation, it was during this period of her life that many of her friends, such as Hitz (her 'foster-father' and loyal administrator) and Samuel Clements (also known as Mark Twain) passed away.

6.2.3. Age 29 - 33 years

In 1910 *The Song of the Stone Wall* was published. This lengthy poem also received severe criticism due to the use of many visual and auditory descriptions. In Keller's later writings she admits that she was hurt by the accusation of 'word-mindedness', (i.e. using sensory words for which she had no first hand knowledge) (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). Keller felt that many people made her feel that her opinions were worthless (Herrmann, 2007), such criticism is illustrated in an article

printed in the Brooklyn Eagle: *"Helen Keller's mistakes spring out of the manifest limitations of her development"* (Davis, 2003, p. 32). However Keller did not shrink back and showed her strength of will and ability for sarcasm with the following retort:

> It was after a meeting that we had in New York on behalf of the blind. At that time the compliments he paid me were so generous that I blush to remember. But now that I have come out for socialism he reminds me and the public that I am blind and deaf and especially liable to error. I must have shrunk in intelligence during the years since I met him. Surely it [*sic*] his turn to blush.
>
> (Davis, 2003, p. 32)

Despite vitriolic and insulting attacks in the press, Keller became a passionate advocate for working people and joined the U.S. Socialist Party in 1909 and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) soon after. She campaigned against World War I, advocated reproductive rights and votes for women and supported Lenin, the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution. As a result, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) kept her under surveillance for most of her adult life (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007). Keller did not only attempt to influence the sighted and hearing, but she also attempted to educate and radicalise the working blind, a group traditionally ignored by most political organisations.

While Keller denounced capitalism, Miss S frequently prevailed upon her to accept capitalist funding. In 1910 their financial situation seemed dismal, and the railway magnet Andrew Carnegie offered Keller a pension for the rest of her life. However she resisted becoming one of his good causes, and wanted to make it on her own (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). By 1913, however, Keller was persuaded by Miss S's poor health and meagre income to accept Mr Carnegie's offer.

At the age of 30, 20 years after embarking on her quest for speech, Keller continued to believe that her lack of comprehensible speech was her greatest handicap. In 1910, a singing teacher trained her in the use of her vocal cords (Herrmann, 2007). It was suggested that this technique should have been the first step in speech training and that much damage had been caused in not doing so earlier. Keller persisted in training and apparently this placed even greater demands on Miss S (Keller, 1956).

In a letter Keller wrote to a friend in 1912, she revealed that she perceived herself to be a burden and blamed herself for getting in people's way, upsetting the peace and being a stumbling block to others (Herrmann, 2007). These comments seemed to relate to the marital problems Miss S and Macy were experiencing. Other writings at this time reflect Keller's spirituality that remained an important part of her life (Davis, 2003).

At the age of 33 she continued to have the power to amaze and inspire others. But a writer, Georgette, who was struck by Keller's beauty and vitality, wrote that her face was a "beautiful blank" and that there was "something eerily incomplete" about Keller (cited in Herrmann, 2007, p. 147). She, like others, had the initial impression that Keller had an ineptitude to express emotions. Yet she was aware of "an impetuous force" within Keller, saying that she "shivered from things not perceived by others – a revelation of a life that has its own laws and conventions" (Herrmann, 2007, p. 148). Georgette concluded that the unfinished 'thing' about Keller was that she had not received feedback from a mirror or the eyes of others that guide, instruct, and correct (Herrmann, 2007).

6.2.4. Age 34 - 39 years

This was an eventful period in Keller's life. Macy and Miss S separated, and Mary Agnes Thompson (also known as Polly) moved in with Keller and Miss S as an assistant. Macy filed for a divorce in 1914 which Miss S never granted him. Although Keller and her personal assistants' financial circumstances were meagre, it was only in 1920 that Keller stopped supporting Macy financially.

In order to meet their own financial demands, Keller continued writing articles and books, and she and Miss S delivered lectures on Keller's experiences at various venues throughout the country from 1914 to 1916. Before making these public appearances, Keller's eyes were replaced with artificial eyes (Berger, 2004; Herrmann, 2007; Kleege, 2006).

One of Keller's articles entitled "Why men Need Woman Suffrage" was published by the New York Call. As Davis (2003) comments: "apart from voicing her 'feminist' views, the article also exemplifies her subversive sense of humour" (p. 9).

On a more serious note, Keller's actions during this period nearly destroyed the angelic public image that had been constructed of her. She marched in protests for woman's suffrage and against war, and this made front page news, and shocked her

admirers. The publication of her socialist book, *Out of the Dark*, her public support for the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, and her plan to elope with her administrative assistant Peter Fagan disgraced her family. Keller came to the full realisation at this time that the public only wanted to hear about her life as a deaf-blind person and discounted her other writings. She was disappointed as this meant that she could not make a living through writing, and she felt misunderstood by her family.

In 1916, while Miss S, accompanied by Polly, was recuperating in Puerto Rico from her illness, Keller's separation from Miss S overwhelmed her with a sense of isolation, and a future without Miss S terrified her. At the same time Peter Fagan, the 29-year-old administrative assistant secretly courted Keller and the couple applied for a marriage license. The newspapers however got wind of this and although Keller lied and denied the relationship, she was forced by her mother to publicly denounce the engagement. Even though Fagan was fired and prohibited from contact with Keller it appears that they managed to communicate for some time after the incident and planned to elope. However, Fagan did not fulfil this plan.

In Keller's later life she admitted that she "yielded to an impetuous longing to be part of a man's life" (Herrmann, 2007, p. 197). Although her hopes of love were dashed, she regarded the brief relationship as a "little island of joy" (Herrmann, 2007, p. 198) and was glad for having experienced being loved and desired. According to Herrmann (2007) in *Midstream: My Later Life,* Keller strongly suggested that she was no longer naïve about love and its physical expression.

Despite the control her mother and others exercised over her she asserted her right to be taken seriously as a political thinker and writer. The following extract from the New York Call (1916) illustrates this.

> They imagine I am in the hands of unscrupulous persons who lead me astray
>
> and persuade me to espouse unpopular causes and make me the mouthpiece of
>
> their propaganda. Now, let it be understood once and for all that … I know
>
> what I am talking about. My sources of information are as good and reliable as
>
> anybody else's. I have papers and magazines from England, France, Germany
>
> and Austria that I can read myself. Not all the editors I have met can do that.
>
> (cited in Davis, 2003, p. 72)

Amidst all these events, their home in Wrentham, Massachusetts was sold and they moved to a house in Forest Hills, New York City.

6.3. Era of Middle Adulthood

One of Keller's desires was to provide financially for Miss S and many of her activities in this era appear to have been directed towards this goal. Keller's adaptability and resilience are evident even after Miss S's death.

6.3.1. Age 39 - 44 years

In 1919, Keller, Miss S and Polly agreed to participate in the production of the Hollywood film *Deliverance*. This was in an attempt to provide the nest egg Keller so dearly wanted to provide for Miss S. However the film was not what they expected and it was a box-office failure (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

Showing characteristic endurance, Keller persuaded Miss S to perform on the Vaudeville circuit for four years, from 1919 to 1922. Although Miss S and others regarded Vaudeville as exhibiting herself for profit, Keller enjoyed the performances, earned a living and felt proud about that (Keller, 1956). This tour helped Keller to build up the trust fund she wanted for Miss S, but once again the funds were rapidly depleted (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

In 1921, Keller's mother died. Nevertheless, Keller insisted on continuing with the show. Later that year Miss S became ill and could not perform on stage with Keller. Polly then accompanied her on stage, and they continued for another year despite Keller feeling lost and uninspired without Miss S.

At the age of 42, Keller received a marriage proposal from a widower with five children which she did not accept. However, her correspondence with the man revealed several truths. She disclosed in her letters that she was tantalised with bodily capabilities which she could not fulfil, and her desire since young to have the love of a man. However she also revealed that she considered that she would be an inescapable burden to a husband and so she felt that she had learned to not reach out or cry for the lost treasures of womanhood (Herrmann, 2007). Further Keller revealed that what she had printed did not provide much knowledge of her actual life. Rather she stated:

> One hides one's awkwardness as much as possible under a kind philosophy
>
> and a smiling face despite her triple affliction – deaf, blind and imperfect

speech.…In some aspects my life has been a very lonely one and books have

been my most intimate companions (Herrmann, 2007, p. 243).

Keller began what was considered to be her life's work at the age of 43.   She worked for the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) as an advocate and fund raiser. She however initially did little for the deaf. As a result of her appointment by AFB, Keller seldom spoke in public of her socialist convictions, although her private correspondence indicates that she remained sympathetic toward the rights of the working class (Davis, 2003).

6.3.2. Age 45 - 50 years

During this period, two of Keller's books were published, namely *My Religion* and *Midstream*: *My Later Life*. It has been reported that after she completed *Midstream* she pronounced that she would write no more books. Keller (1956) describes the subject of *Midstream* as "economic, social and political...horrors of industrialisation" (Keller, 1956, p. 186). However other writers, such as Herrmann (2007), note more personal issues relating to Keller's knowledge of love and sex, and suggest that this openness may have been as a consequence of her mother's death.

As a result of Keller's involvement with the AFB, the Lions Club became one of the first major contributors to the fight against blindness with the launch of the 'Knights of the Blind' project in 1925 (American Foundation for the Blind, 1885-1980).

6.3.3. Age 51 - 55 years

In her 50s, although Keller's chestnut hair was greying and she had a fuller figure, she was still attractive and according to her annual medical checkups her health was excellent (Herrmann, 2007). Unfortunately, the same could not be said for Miss S who had gained weight and whose health was faltering.

By 1930, Keller had contributed significantly to having Braille accepted as the standard form of print for the blind. Having had to learn five forms of print for the blind Keller was well versed in the enormity of the task, not to mention the folly thereof.   She was also instrumental in getting the U.S. congress to pass a law providing for libraries for the blind throughout the USA (Herrmann, 2007).

This period marks the beginning of Keller's extensive world travel that peaked in her late 60s and early 70s. In 1930 Keller travelled to England, Scotland and Ireland, and in 1932 she travelled to England, Scotland, Yugoslavia, and France (American Foundation for the Blind, 1885 - 1980). Most of her trips were as an ambassador for the AFB. There were also a few trips for personal reasons such as to trace Miss S's ancestry and to visit relations in a more temperate climate thought to be more suitable for Miss S's health.

During the period of the 'Great Depression' in the 1930s, in addition to her work for the AFB, Keller supplemented their income by writing for traditional women's magazines. Notably, most of these later articles avoid any discussion of radical topics although some show that Keller had not entirely given up agitating for women's rights. Her tongue-in-cheek humour can also be seen again in the article "Put Your Husband in the Kitchen" (Davis, 2003).

In 1932 Macy, Miss S's estranged husband, died. This evoked many strong emotions for Miss S and Keller was increasingly becoming Miss S's support and guide both emotionally and spiritually.   Keller described this period as a slow painful separation from Miss S, and she found it difficult to enjoy beauty without her (Keller, 1956).

6.3.4. Age 56 - 59

On 20 October 1936 Miss S passed away. After 50 years of tutelage, companionship and interdependence Miss S's death could be described as Keller's severest crisis. Miss S had planned for as many aspects of Keller's well-being as she could for after her death. However, only through her death and absence could the aim of Miss S's life's work – for Keller to become a whole individual – be put to the test. Keller's grief was expressed in her shock, denial, pain, depression, and anger. Many people wondered, watched and waited to see if Keller could go on living without Miss S (Herrmann, 2007). She and Polly went to Scotland to get away from the publicity and probing (Herrmann, 2007). Keller's journal reflects that she read often during their ocean voyage and she marvelled again at the freedom literature had given her (Herrmann, 2007).

Although Keller was heartbroken, she met this permanent separation with immense courage and fortitude, showing her strength and resilience (Herrmann, 2007). She continued to travel and visited Japan in 1937. Despite earlier proclaiming that she

would write no more books, Keller wrote another three after Miss S's death. This proved that she was capable of fine literary work without Miss S (Braddy-Henney, 1956).

In the same year, their Forest Hills home was sold and Keller and Polly moved to Arcan Ridge, Westport, Connecticut. Unlike many handicapped people, Keller was adaptable to different situations. She could live without Miss S, live in different homes and travel to numerous foreign countries but at the age of 59 she still depended on Polly and others for many daily functions of life.

6.4. Era of Late Adulthood

This period began with much activity and Keller's ambassadorial trips to 35 countries on five continents predominated much of this era. However, due to both Keller's and Polly's increasing age, declining health seemed inevitable and death was unavoidable.

6.4.1. Age 60 - 66 years

This was the period of World War II. Although not outspoken about the topic, Keller had not given up on her political views or support of communism. These perspectives made the FBI more vigilant in their surveillance of Keller. It has been suspected that it was only her handicaps which saved her from becoming the target of a witch-hunt (Davis, 2003).

Despite Keller's protestations against the war, from 1943 to 1946 she visited wounded soldiers in military hospitals. Unlike other celebrity visitors, Keller encouraged the men to deal realistically with their disability (Herrmann, 2007). She was a living testimony and became a symbol of hope particularly to the blinded and deafened soldiers. Keller had long wanted to get to know ordinary working people rather than associating with the wealthy philanthropists, politicians, and business magnets (Herrmann, 2007). Keller, however, was aware of the advantage she had gained from her financial benefactors, and even in her more politically muted writings it can be seen that Keller retained a class perspective in her disability rights work (Davis, 2003).

Keller (1956) expressed that in her work in the military hospitals she finally felt that she had fulfilled the work Miss S had yearned to do, and she experienced a sense of peace.

6.4.2. Age 67 - 80 years

This period appears to have been a very busy time in Keller's life. In 1946, she undertook her first official trip for AFB overseas, and in the next 11 years she visited five continents and 35 countries. These included Canada, South America, Scandinavia, Australia, the Far East, South Africa and many European, Asian and Arabic countries. She was the guest of kings and presidents, and with her persuasive powers many of her visits resulted in the establishment of schools for the blind and deaf in those countries (Herrmann, 2007). Although Keller had actively campaigned for the blind and for many years felt that she could not do so for both the deaf and blind, in the latter part of her life this seemed to have changed. Apart from her overseas trips she was actively involved in the AFB in the USA establishing a special service for the deaf-blind (Herrmann, 2007).

While on tour in 1946, Arcan Ridge, their home in Westport, Connecticut, burned down. The fire destroyed all Keller's and Miss S's letters, documents and the book Keller was writing about Miss S (Keller, 1956). Keller is reported to have felt partly relieved at the destruction of many of the documents as neither she nor Miss S, nor Polly had the heart to do this. A new house was built and in characteristic resilience Keller at the age of 67 started anew and continued with her work for the blind (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

Amongst her many travels, Keller visited the 'black, silent holes' that had once been Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The contrast in descriptions from her previous visit, and the stories from the survivors she met moved her deeply. This time she spoke out clearly against nuclear war (Davis, 2003).

Upon her return from Japan she was hospitalised and her gall-bladder was removed (Herrmann, 2007). Apart from this, according to medical records in her early 70s, Keller was reported to be in excellent health, however her hands had become less sensitive and her sense of smell and taste were less keen (Herrmann, 2007). Polly was becoming more frail but she did not want anyone to take her place and isolated Keller even more as her condition worsened. Keller said she would travel less and lead a more relaxed lifestyle. They however continued to travel and in 1953 Keller began work again on her book about Miss S (*Teacher).* By necessity, due to the fire, much of this was done from memory. The writing of *Teacher* was an emotional time for Keller. She wept bitterly, was filled with anguish, suffered from insomnia and developed eczema (Herrmann, 2007). Much of her anguish was due to

her knowledge of the sacrifice of others for her development and quality of life. A close friend noted that during this time Keller became intensely introspective and learned things about herself that no one could have taught her. *Teacher* was published in 1955. It was in this book that Keller commented that she and Miss S had very different fundamental viewpoints (Keller, 1956).

In 1954, while writing *Teacher*, Keller was hospitalised for two weeks on account of her eczema. Upon seeing photographs taken at approximately this time, her sister commented that Keller was looking "old, decrepit and haggard" (Herrmann, 2007, p. 300). At the age of 75 when Keller was asked if she would now retire she replied "Retiring, I dislike the word" (Herrmann, 2007, p. 307). She informed friends that she wanted to study foreign languages, history, archaeology, and philosophy. She had lost interest in novels but devoured books on nature (Herrmann, 2007). She said she would still like to learn more and that death was just around the corner. Keller did not fear death, rather she seemed to welcome it due to her belief that she would then be able to see and hear (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). Keller had asked Polly to give her a deadly dose of prescription pills when she knew her end was near (Herrmann, 2007; Kleege, 2006).

By this time Keller was best known as the public face of the AFB but her communist leanings continued to cause consternation, with certain donors threatening to withdraw their financial support from the foundation (Davis, 2003). This behaviour however did not deter Harvard from awarding Keller an honorary degree. This was one of many but likely the most significant.

On one of their visits to Europe, Keller visited a relative where a neighbour later commented that she was struck by the 'incompleteness of Keller's countenance' (Herrmann, 2007). She also noted Keller's apparent lack of physical fear and that conversation was difficult as Keller would interrupt as she did not know when others were talking. These aspects were seldom, if ever, commented on in her earlier life. Further, those who knew Keller personally noted that in later life her anger festered and she seldom forgave an injustice. However at the age of 76, more than 60 years after breaking ties, Keller made peace with Perkins School for the Blind and returned for a visit (Herrmann, 2007).

After returning from their tour to Scandinavia in 1957, one of Keller's toes was removed due to a bone tumour (Herrmann, 2007). Later that year Polly had a stroke and as a result imprisoned Keller socially. By 1958 Keller was in frail health,

physically inactive and seldom went for walks. She experienced difficulty with the finger alphabet, both in spelling and in following words spelt on her palm (Herrmann, 2007). Winny Corbelly moved in to nurse Polly and to assist Keller, and later Evalyn Seide Walter was employed to assist Keller with mostly administrative duties.

6.4.3. Age 81 - Death

This period of Keller's life began with the death of Polly who left nothing to Keller in her will. Keller retaliated by refusing to attend the commitment service and wearing Polly's much loved mink coat to social gatherings (Herrmann, 2007).

For a few short years after Polly's death Keller seemed to experience more freedom than she ever had. There no longer seemed to be the need for stakeholders to shape, mould, and maintain her public image. She was said to be a rogue – liked eating hot dogs, drinking martinis, endorsing unlikely products with her celebrity status and wearing her red high heels (Herrmann, 2007). A young actress described Keller at the age of 80 as a "woman who carried herself upright...had thin hair…was buxom…had small hips…great looking legs…a terrific smile…and interacted like a jolly grandma" (Herrmann, 2007, p. 325). Keller however mentioned more than once that she had never been happy about her voice (Keller, 1956).

Unfortunately, the image created here did not last for long. In 1961 Keller suffered the first of a series of strokes which were later complicated by diabetes. Her physician instructed Keller to retire from public life, and over the next seven years Keller's ability to make decisions decreased markedly. Towards the end of her life, Keller was confined to a wheelchair and bed. In 1964 Keller was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Lyndon B. Johnson, and was elected to the Woman's Hall of Fame. She seemed however to have been unaware of either of these awards (Herrmann, 2007).

Keller passed away in her home at Arcan Ridge on 1 June 1968, a few weeks before her eighty-eighth birthday. Despite her last will, her family ignored the importance of Keller's religion to her. They disregarded Helen's wish for a Swendenbourgian minister at her funeral, and had a Presbyterian minister preside (Herrmann, 2007). Keller's ashes were laid to rest alongside Miss S and Polly in the Washington National Cathedral, Washington DC.

Conclusion

In this chapter Keller's life was divided into developmental eras that approximate Levinson's (1996) life structure theory, however the developmental periods within each era were determined by what the researcher considered to be significant physical, social or psychological events.

In the following chapter Keller's life as depicted in this chapter is discussed within the formal psychological framework of Levinson's theory.

CHAPTER SEVEN
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Levinson's life structure theory (1996), as discussed in Chapter Three, is utilised in this penultimate chapter to discuss Keller's unique life structure and patterns of development, using the data collected as discussed in Chapter Six. Apart from an analysis of the developmental periods and their tasks, the central, peripheral and unfilled components of Keller's life, as well as the satisfactoriness of her life structure are brought to the fore. In this way, the unique life structure and pattern of development of Keller, as a handicapped person living in the first half of the twentieth century, can be compared with that of non-handicapped individuals of the late twentieth century.

7.1. Era of Pre-adulthood (birth - 22 years)

Although childhood is not the focus of Levinson's theory (1996), the broad biopsychosocial character of this era in Keller's life is briefly discussed here. This era is characterised by the most rapid growth, physically, cognitively and emotionally. However it will be seen that Keller's development in this era did not occur as proposed in Levinson's theory (1996).

7.1.1. Infancy (birth - 2 years)

Data collected indicate that infant Keller's first 18 months of life were similar to other infants during this period of development. She lived in a family who by all indications provided protection, socialisation and support. However, the illness she suffered at 19 months left her blind and deaf. This forced her to remain physically dependent on her mother, yet it appears that she was to a large extent psychologically isolated. It can thus be argued that the crucial developmental process of separation and individuation was disrupted. However, it seems that the caregiving Keller received from her mother in particular provided the foundation critical for the development of her personality.

7.1.2. Early Childhood (2 - 6 years)

Due to the historical period in which Keller lived little was known regarding the care of, and education of the deaf-blind (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1903; Kleege,

2006). As a result, the expansion of Keller's social world and norms was very limited. Although theory suggests that children in this stage typically develop sensitivity toward others and a need to help (Santrock, 2002), Keller appears to have been largely without this at this stage (see section 6.1.2.). However, she appears to have developed the need to help at a later stage. During middle childhood her need to help was demonstrated through the empathy, and fund raising Keller embarked upon for the education of the deaf-blind boy, Tommy Stringer. A strong sense of helping others was demonstrated throughout the rest of her lifespan, and appears to have been a central component of her life structure (Levinson 1996).

Unlike most children at this age who describe themselves in terms of their name, age, gender, address, and friends, Keller had no understanding of these concepts (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956; Santrock, 2002). It is thus understandable that she later described herself as a 'phantom in a world of nothingness' (Berger, 2004; Keller 1956). In light of the above, it appears that she did not identify herself in the same manner as other children in her age group would.

Due to the lack of discipline from her parents, Keller had no means of assimilating or integrating the knowledge necessary for the development of self-discipline that usually develops during this period. Instead, this seems to have led to rampant emotional struggles within Keller, and between her and her family (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956; Santrock, 2002)

7.1.3. Middle Childhood (6 - 12 years)

The period of middle childhood is generally regarded by developmental theorists as a time of relative calm as development is said to not be as rapid as the preceding or successive periods (Levinson, 1996; Santrock, 2002). This however was not the case for Keller.

Although Keller had developed physically as other children her age would, she had not learned the full range of physical movements such as hopping and skipping. Further she had not learned social conduct, language or various emotional expressions. However, once Miss S was able to get through to Keller, her intellectual, social and emotional development occurred at a rapid rate. The self-discipline and the ability to work that are said to begin in the previous period (Santrock, 2002) became very evident in this period. Her characteristics of strength of will, endurance and intellectual ability could be seen in her aptitude and willingness to learn. Her seeming

natural affinity for language, and her relationship with books appear to have laid the foundation for a central component of her life structure. However, despite the effort and energy she expended on the acquisition of speech (a central component for many decades), it remained an unfilled component in her life. Speech was something she wanted but could not attain, and this had an impact on the development of her self-concept. This was evident in her view that she had a 'triple affliction': deafness, blindness and imperfect speech, with her citing the latter as the worst of the three (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

Given the tremendous development and learning that took place during this period (see section 6.1.3.) it can be argued that the development that is said to occur in Early Childhood (Levinson, 1996; Santrock, 2002) occurred at this later stage for Keller. However, she appears to have continued with many of the appropriate biopsychosocial development tasks of middle childhood (see section 6.1.3.). It thus stands to reason that this period lasted two years longer for Keller than Levinson's 1996 theory generally suggests.

Several writers suggest that Keller expressed a wider range of emotions once she began to learn language (Berger, 2004; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). It is likely that her language acquisition culminated with the natural developmental process of this stage at which emotions become more complex. It is also possible that this culmination of complex emotions and their expression, together with the rapid learning that occurred, resulted in Keller's nervous exhaustion.

According to theory (Levinson 1996), certain experiences during this period have significant consequences on the development of the self-concept. As Keller later wrote (Berger, 2004; Keller, 1956), Miss S had given birth to Keller's soul, and rescued her from psychological isolation. Although these events led to Keller's separation from her mother, it would be many, many years before the developmental tasks of infancy, separation and individuation from Miss S, would become evident. The researcher deduces that due to Keller's double handicap, physical separation and independence was impossible.

At this stage, through her remarkable learning, she seemed to undergo a new birth. Unfortunately her steps toward separation and individuation symbolised in the writing of *The Frost King* were severely punished with a charge of plagiarism. This debacle was cause for Keller's uncertainty and led to her questioning her sense of self. It is

understandable then that Keller and Miss S formed a very close bond, one which led writers to refer to Keller as a 'collaborative personality' (Berger, 2004).

7.1.4. Adolescence (12 - 17 years)

Based on significant biopsychosocial events in Keller's life this period appears to have spanned from 14 to 20 years, moving beyond the two year overlap that Levinson (1996) speaks of.

Biologically Keller's development was appropriate for this period, being characterised by bodily changes and sexual maturation. Despite Keller's attractive physical appearance, her intellectual ability, sexual maturation, and a nature that drew her toward men, her adolescent years passed without close relationships with others of her age. Further, since Miss S and Keller's mother filtered information, restricted her social contact, and screened her reading material, the cultural and historical context, living conditions, poverty, and the lack of meaningful relationships appear to have had little influence on the development of her self-concept at this stage. This naïvety may have permitted Keller the courage to pursue two central components of her life: speech and education.

Although education for women in this period was considered risky, and these women were considered cold, sexless spinsters (Herrmann, 2007), stakeholders may have agreed to her education as a means of keeping Keller pure and virtuous. Instead, she became painfully aware of her dependence and social isolation, and seemed to be psychologically unaware of her uniqueness apart from her handicap (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). However, it appears that it was only in her early 20s that Keller became aware that her thoughts and observations were unique and that others were interested, for a short while at least, in hearing about them (Davis, 2003; Herrmann 2007).

Taking the above discussion regarding Keller's Pre-adult development into account it can be seen that certain events such as illness, the arrival of Miss S, and her schooling demarcate the time periods of development which approximate Levinson's (1996) developmental periods of this era. The developmental tasks of Keller's life, however, were significantly disrupted by the onset of her handicaps. Many of the developmental tasks of early childhood were not attained age appropriately, yet seem to have been rapidly developed during middle childhood. At this time, Keller appears to have simultaneously engaged in age appropriate developmental tasks of the period

which lasted two years longer than Levinson (1996) suggests. As a result, her late childhood period continued into her late teens, yet seemed to be devoid of many of the typical experiences of this time. Table 7.1 below illustrates the comparison between Keller's periods of development and Levinson's (1996) typical developmental periods.

7.2. Early Adult Transition (17 - 22 years)

According to Levinson's life structure theory (1996) this period is the first cross-era transition. Although Keller appears to have entered this period slightly later than Levinson's theory suggests, she seems to have shown the changes in behaviour that characterise these transitions. Keller displayed a rebellious nature that one may expect in adolescence, (shown, for example, in her writings on controversial issues), and she acknowledged that she rebelled against the constraints of time (Keller, 1956). She however was simultaneously laying the foundation for the social concerns she would address throughout her adult life.

In this period the naïvety and childlike attitude Keller held about the world were replaced by a somewhat harsh reality, suggesting her maturation into adulthood. However, Keller's optimism in the goodwill of humankind endured.

The optimism Keller demonstrated may have been influenced by external aspects (Levinson, 1996) of the historical period. The early 1900s was characterised by an atmosphere of hope and optimism (Bates, 1976), and seems to have coincided with a significant period of development in Keller's life structure and her enlightenment regarding social conditions (see section 6.2.1.).

Levinson (1996) proposes that uncertainty regarding the future characterises this period. Keller however seemed to be certain that her future would be one of writing to make a living for herself and Miss S (Berger, 2004; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). This indicates that she gladly accepted the responsibilities of adulthood as well as fulfilling her desire to provide for Miss S.

On the other hand, the emotional turmoil she experienced after graduating may be interpreted as an indication of insecurity regarding her future. At this time Keller had completed her studies, leaving the predictable routine; financial resources were uncertain; and Miss S and Macy were engaged to be married, possibly creating uncertainty regarding her relationship with Miss S (Herrmann, 2007; Kleege, 2006).

Table 7.1.

Keller's Periods of Development (*) Compared to Levinson's (1996) Typical Periods

in the Eras of Development

Era of Pre-adulthood		Era of Early Adulthood		Era of Middle Adulthood		Era of Late Adulthood	
Infancy	Birth-2 *0-19m	Early adult transition	17-22 *20-24	Mid-life transition	40-45 *39-44	Late adult transition	60-65 *59-66
Early childhood	2-6 *19m-6	Entry life structure for early adulthood	22-28 *24-28	Entry life structure for middle adulthood	45-50 *44-50	Late adulthood	65-death *66-80 *80-87
Middle childhood	6-12 *6-14	Age 30 transition	28-33 *29-33	Age 50 transition	50-55 *50-56		
Adolescence	12-17 *14-20	Culminating life structure for early adulthood	33-40 *33-39	Culminating life structure for middle adulthood	55-60 *56-59		

As Keller had no significant school friends there was little need to modify these relationships, however her relationships with family and Miss S underwent change and modification during this period. As she began to express her views and opinions, her individuation of thought began to surface and Keller had begun to carve a unique place for herself in the adult world (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007). The public, however, continued to doubt Keller's abilities and did not recognise her as a separate, unique adult regardless of her handicaps (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1903).

7.3. Era of Early Adulthood (17 - 45 years)

As discussed in Chapter Three this era is divided into three developmental periods, each with specific developmental tasks. It will be seen that the periods in Keller's life do not entirely correspond with but approximate Levinson's time frames (as illustrated in Table 7.1).

7.3.1. Entry Life Structure for Early Adulthood (22 - 28 years)

As mentioned above, Keller's intention was to make a living as a writer, specifically with regards to the social injustices of the world, fighting for the rights of workers, the blind and women's suffrage (Berger, 2004; Herrmann,2007; Keller, 1956). Keller's desire to advocate for the rights of the marginalised may also have been influenced by socialist movements of the time (Bates, 1976; Davis, 2003). Although the existing socialist movements were not focused on the concerns and issues of the handicapped, it was in this area that Keller did her greatest work. The researcher deduces that her success in this area can be attributed to a culmination of internal and external aspects (Levinson, 1996) of Keller's life. In other words, Keller's strength of will, her rebellious nature, and her handicaps, together with social acceptance of her fighting for the rights of handicapped people and later her employment by the AFB influenced, and channelled, Keller's advocacy role.

In this period, Keller indeed spent much time reading, learning and writing on these topics. It appears that her aim was to find her voice and become an activist for these causes. In this way, Keller could enrich her life and the lives of many others. By so doing she would have been fulfilling what appeared to be a central component in her life – to serve others.

Although the quantity of biographical information during this period of Keller's life is not plentiful, there is evidence (see section 6.2.2.) of important choices she made regarding marriage, motherhood, family of origin, occupation, and community (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). All of these are appropriate developmental tasks according to Levinson's life structure theory (1996). Keller indicated, when probed, that she would like to marry if it were not for the burden her handicaps would place on a husband (Herrmann, 2007). Thus suggesting that she had made a decision not to marry. Keller's family of origin, apart from her mother, was seldom mentioned in her adult life other than that they were embarrassed by the things she wrote about. Keller also made choices regarding her occupation and the community. In her writings, as cited in Davis (2003), she not only argued and fought for social rights for specific marginalised groups but she also took a stand against personal criticism.

Miss S and Macy married when Keller was 25 years old. This may have constituted a major event in Keller's life as she had benefited from Miss S's 'undivided attention' for the previous 19 years (Herrmann, 2007). What exactly this union meant to Keller is not known, however it appears that a key relationship with

Macy was formed, and that Miss S's commitment to Keller was reinforced. Keller's relationship with Macy seems to have consolidated her aims to earn a living through writing, and to learn more about socialism and agitate for rights.

It appears that Keller experienced the illusion that Levinson (1996) proposed characterises this stage. This typical illusion is the assumption that the choices and decisions made in this period establish the structure for the entire lifespan. For example, it appears that she believed that setting her critics right concerning her use of visual and auditory descriptions would settle the matter once and for all. She later learned that this was not the case as criticism continued (Davis, 2003).

7.3.2. Age 30 Transition (28 - 33 years)

This period of Keller's life could be interpreted as a time of bewildering discoveries. Her plans to be an author and activist were dashed in a variety of ways (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). The criticism she had hoped to quell regarding 'word-mindedness' continued. Keller also learned that many people were not interested in her views on politics and economics, but rather wanted to hear about her life as a handicapped person. Further there were insinuations that Keller lacked intelligence. Thus suggesting that the life plan she arduously constructed was flawed and was no longer suitable – a typical predicament of this period (Levinson, 1996; Levinson et al., 1978).

Keller, therefore, was led to question and re-evaluate several decisions and choices she had made. At this time of her life she had the opportunity to rectify her prior decline of financial assistance from Mr Carnegie and accepted the pension as an alternative means to provide for Miss S (a central component in her life). In addition, Keller embarked on another quest for speech (also a central component) in preparation for delivering lectures as a means to make a living (American Foundation for the Blind, 1885-1980; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). Keller's need to practice speech placed higher demands on Miss S. At this time Miss S and Macy were experiencing marital difficulties and Keller appears to have been caught in a contradictory position. On the one hand, determined to acquire speech to provide financially for Miss S, while on the other hand, being aware of the demands this task placed on Miss S, as well as its possible contribution to her marital turmoil. As a result, Keller experienced self-blame and guilt for the burden she placed on others.

This indicates the importance of relationships in Keller's life and correlates with Levinson's theory (1996).

The main developmental task of this period is that of 'adult' individuation and restructuring (Levinson, 1996). As discussed in this section, it appears that Keller made several conscious adjustments in her life structure, however her individuation seems to have been more subtle. Here it appears that the sighted initially misinterpreted Keller's ineptitude to express emotions. This blurred their ability to recognise the unique laws and conventions of Keller's life, and the 'impetuous forces that drove her' (Berger, 2004; Herrmann, 2007). In other words, the researcher is of the opinion that Keller was psychologically individuated, however her physical dependence on others and the barriers of communication prevented others from recognising her development in this area.

7.3.3. Culminating Life Structure for Early Adulthood (33 - 40 years)

Levinson's theory (1996) suggests that this period can be regarded as a time of settling down. However (see section 6.2.4.) in Keller's life this was an eventful time with several changes in relationships, physical circumstances and personal meanings (Herrmann, 2007).

Although Keller's actions at this stage seemed to threaten her saintly image and the financial support from 'capitalist' benefactors (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007), it can be argued that she was attempting to create a secure life structure within herself and society, as an activist and author. Within this structure she could pursue her youthful dreams and goals while moving from a junior to a senior member of the adult world.

Furthermore, Keller's romantic relationship with Fagon suggests her striving to gain a sense of her own personhood, and that it was important for her to be affirmed in her own world. Despite the external contexts that prevented her marriage she asserted herself in her writing, demanding that she be recognised in her own right and not as a mouthpiece for any other person (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007).

Some people might interpret her actions and behaviours to have been irresponsible. However, in both her romantic relationship and her activism, it can be argued that she was engaging in appropriate developmental tasks. She strove to gain independence, to be competent, responsible, and to be taken seriously (Davis, 2003; Levinson 1996).

Keller may have experienced great difficulties during this period but it is likely that she also experienced great growth, dealing with these difficulties with a large

degree of satisfactoriness (Levinson, 1996). At this stage of her development, Keller appeared to have quickly forgiven those who prevented her union with Fagon (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). She assumed responsibility for the disruption this caused, and turned her attention to helping others once again (a life-long central component).

A difficulty Keller faced in this period was coming to terms with the public opinion concerning her topics of writing. It appears that Keller was forced by circumstances to modify her ideas of writing for a living (another of her central life components), resulting in this becoming an unfilled component (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

Levinson (1996) describes this era as the most dramatic of all the eras. The events and choices Keller made during this era certainly created drama. The energy of which Levinson speaks is evident during this era and appears to continue throughout Keller's life. Perhaps the vigour with which she tackled social issues declined, however it appears that this was due more to pressure by stakeholders than to a decline in energy. This exemplifies the contradiction and stress that characterise this era, as Keller was driven by her inner passions and ambitions of social rights and love. At the same time, she strove to provide for Miss S and attempted to meet the demands placed on her by Miss S, other stakeholders and her mother (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956; Kleege, 2006).

According to Levinson (1996), decisions made in this era can cause maladjustment if they are not compatible with, or place too high demands on, the individual and are in conflict with the personal needs and desires. It appears that Keller's strength of will and stubbornness allowed her to make the choice to take a stand for socialism (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007). By so doing she met her needs and desires at this time of her life, whereas to have given in to the expectations of the angelic public image may have resulted in maladjustment, thwarting her rebellious nature.

Keller's choices in this era appear to have provided the life structure appropriate for her and allowed her to move into the transition stage of Middle Adulthood.

7.4. Mid-life Transition (40 - 45 years)

According to Levinson (1996) this transition period is a time in which the individual makes adjustments and seeks a balance in life. In this period, the

individual solidifies certain aspects of the life structure, and modifies others according to internal and external aspects.

Keller's correspondence with the widower who proposed to her (see section 6.3.1.) seemed to reinforce her choice not to marry, but also illustrates her process of modifying, or at least acknowledging, her sense of self. She seemed to recognise herself as a woman who had desires but who would not marry, who was not fully known or understood, and whose most intimate relationship was with literature (Herrmann, 2007). This suggests to the researcher that, in Keller's case, the developmental tasks of Culminating Life Structure from Early Adulthood (Levinson, 1996) continued in this stage. Notably, marriage as an apparent peripheral life component seems to have shifted several times up to this period – from a peripheral to a central component (in which she invested much energy), to the status of an unfilled life component, finally appearing to settle into the category of peripheral component.

Vaudeville appears to have been a turning-point for Keller at which her own satisfaction and pride in what she was doing counted for more than her success in the world of politics, a typical feature of this stage according to Levinson (1996). Keller appears to have found a balance in certain areas such as focusing on her own needs, work, and fulfilment, yet she was also conscious of being a part of the Vaudeville circuit, and social groups (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). In addition, she did not give up on her socialist stance, rather it appears that Keller had begun modifying her approach to fighting for the rights of the marginalised (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007).

There are some who may consider Keller's brief 'acting career' as an expression of a 'mid-life crisis'. The researcher however interprets her brief Hollywood experience as Keller's attempt to answer her question of how she would adjust her life structure to provide for Miss S (which remained a central component of Keller's life until Miss S's death).

Levinson's (1996) theory further suggests that most individuals experience severe developmental crises during this period, marked by uncertainty causing anger, sadness or fear. Although Keller lost her mother, and Miss S's failing health required that she adjust to performing with Polly, Keller's distress appears to have manifest as a feeling of being lost and uninspired. She, however, continued to perform on the Vaudeville circuit.

Although not an active member of her family of origin, and having no family of her own, Keller referred to those closest to her as her family (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956), and her appointment to AFB may have fulfilled the desires individuals have at this stage to leave a legacy for future generations (usually their children). Furthermore, her appointment at AFB also seems to have necessitated a reduction in voicing her social convictions, thereby causing her to seek a new balance of engagement in and separateness from the world – an illustration of the transitional character of this stage.

This period of change and adjustment, culminating in Keller's appointment to AFB, appears to have laid the foundation that resulted in a markedly different character in her mid-forties compared to her thirties, with her adjusting to what may be interpreted as an appropriate balance between youthfulness and ageing. This transition indeed seems to have marked the beginning of Keller's passage through Middle Adulthood to her position as a member of the senior generation.

7.5. Era of Middle Adulthood (40 - 65 years)

This is the third era in Levinson's life structure theory (1996) and also has Entry, Transition, and Culminating periods of development. However the biopsychosocial character and developmental tasks differ.

7.5.1. Entry Life Structure for Middle Adulthood (45 - 50 years)

The developmental task in this period once again is to create a structure from which the individual can evolve through this era. The two books Keller had published during this stage of her life could be indicative of changes that may have been taking place within Keller. For example, although *Midstream* deals with issues of industrialisation, Keller also appears to have spoken more freely about her personal life. This hints at a characteristic difference of this period compared to the prior era – that of changing relationships. This may have been due to Keller's adjustment to her mother's death which necessitated a modification in the relationship and allowed her to express more freedom in her feelings and attitudes. There also appears to have been a difference in the way Keller related to readers and the public (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007). In addition, there also seems to have been a change in Keller's approach to activism. The researcher interprets Keller's decision to not write more books, and the alliance she fostered between the Lions Club and AFB, as indicative of

important differences within the relationships that form the central components of the life structure. In other words, Keller seems to have moved from a single voice fighting or rebelling against economic and political world change, to a more focused, mature way of bringing about change.

In the researcher's opinion, then, Keller appears to demonstrate features typical of this developmental period, of being psychologically and emotionally more flexible, and able to invest more in the development of the future generation.

7.5.2. Age 50 Transition (50 - 55 years)

This is a period in which the individual reappraises, and may modify, the Entry Life Structure. It appears that Keller's previous choices necessitated little or no modification despite the economic depression of the 1930s. She continued her work for AFB and her 'restrained' writing, yet maintained her socialist stance, and continued to pursue her quest to provide for Miss S. Her development continued through her exploration of the world with a view to provide for Miss S and to serve the blind community. In this manner she also appears to have formed a more suitable life structure (Levinson, 1996).

As mentioned, the adjustments and changes that Keller made in previous developmental periods appear to have been suitable and are likely to have contributed to minimising the occurrence of developmental crises common in this period of change (Levinson, 1996). Although the physical changes in Keller's body do not seem to have affected her, external factors in the form of Miss S's failing health and the death of Macy, brought about critical changes in Keller's experience and her relationships (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). The researcher speculates that these external factors brought about crises for Keller. For example, she expressed that the description of the world as provided by Polly was different to that provided by Miss S (Keller, 1956), thus Keller would have had to adapt to this. This in turn suggests a different way of interpreting and understanding the world. It can then be argued that this may have posed a crisis in Keller's life. Keller's greatest crisis however occurred in the period of Levinson's Culminating Life Structure for Middle Adulthood when Miss S, Keller's teacher, companion and confidant of 50 years passed away.

7.5.3. Culminating Life Structure for Middle Adulthood (55 - 60 years)

Although Keller, like other individuals in this period, appears to have achieved satisfactoriness, whether she attained her dreams and goals of Middle Adulthood, in this period, is debatable.

Her satisfactoriness is illustrated in the manner in which she coped with Miss S's death. In other words, Keller's prior choices and life structure development rewarded her in this challenging time. On the other hand, however, Keller had a steady income from AFB, the pension from Mr Carnegie, and an income from articles she wrote (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956), yet her ability to provide for Miss S may have come too late. Thus not achieving one of her life's goals and central components. Furthermore, in terms of her goals regarding the blind, her accomplishments thus far appear to have only been the tip of the iceberg when compared to later work (American Foundation for the Blind, 1885-1980; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). In light of this observation, the researcher assumes that Keller's dream (or goal) was to serve the blind by breaking down all barriers that marginalised the blind, with no particular end goal in mind.

It is also unclear whether Keller experienced this concluding phase as a time of rich satisfactions and bitter disappointments, and whether she discovered that the era had given more, and less than she anticipated. As a reader of her life story the researcher is of the opinion that the above was as relevant for Keller as for the participants of Levinson's study, and other individuals in this stage of life. For example, Keller had provided for Miss S but perhaps not quite as she had envisaged; she had found a means of serving the marginalised, yet only a certain group (the blind); and although she had given up on writing books early in this era her inspiration and talent was rekindled and she revelled in the freedom literature provided her (Herrmann, 2007).

From the above discussion, it appears that the adjusted life structure Keller created during the transition stage was largely maintained throughout her Middle Adulthood. As can be seen, this era differed biopsychosocially, emotionally, and in terms of her internal and external sources, from the previous era.

Although physiological capacity declines for many after Early Adulthood (Levinson 1996) this was not evident in Keller's case. Instead she led a rather energetic and socially valuable life. However, due to the restraints placed on her by

her appointment to AFB, how personally satisfying her life was during this era is questionable.

According to Levinson (1996), individuals in Middle Adulthood usually become senior members of their own world, unless their "lives are hampered in some special way" (p. 20). The researcher has found this statement somewhat difficult to interpret. However, in relation to Keller's life the researcher's view is that Keller was not yet a senior member of her world. Miss S had controlled much of Keller's life, and the researcher believes that Keller took sole membership of her world only after Miss S's death. This thus required Keller to mature within her world in her own way (Levinson, 1996). Although there were others on whom Keller depended, none had the influence over Keller that Miss S had.

Levinson (1996) also observed that it is in this era that women demonstrate a need for personal expression and growth. However, Keller appears to have pursued personal growth and expressed herself for much of her adult life, and this characteristic does not seem to have been particular to this era of her life (Davis, 2003; Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1903, 1956).

As Levinson (1996) suggests, in general, Keller's drives and tensions appear to have been less conflictual than in previous eras, enriching her quality of life and enabling her to facilitate the development of the younger generation.

7.6. Late Adult Transition (60 - 65 years)

This period has been referred to as a profound period of transition, marking the beginning of the final era (Levinson, 1996; Levinson et al. 1978). In the researcher's view this transition seemed to pass unnoticed, with Keller simply continuing with her work. In preparation for Keller's old-age and retirement, it seems that others (possibly Keller's trustees and benefactors), arranged her move to Arcan Ridge (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

It appears that Keller met the developmental task of sustaining youthfulness in a new form appropriate to Late Adulthood, demonstrated in the manner in which she handled her visits to military hospitals (Herrmann, 2007). Her awareness that she had fulfilled one of Miss S's dreams (Keller, 1956) could be indicative that Keller was in the process of evaluating the past, a typical task of this stage of life (Levinson, 1996). Furthermore, it is possible that Keller had the sense that her life had been of no value to self or others until her work in the hospitals (Keller, 1956; Levinson, 1996).

According to the researcher, the sense of utter despair that Levinson (1996) suggests occurs during the period of Late Adult transition only became evident in Keller's life well into Late Adulthood when she wrote *Teacher*. It is possible that Keller's time of true reflection and evaluation of the past took place in her 70s and not during this transition as is suggested by Levinson (1996).

7.7. Era of Late Adulthood (65 years - death)

Levinson (1996) did not divide this era into shorter developmental periods, however Levinson et al. (1978) recognised a period of Late Late Adulthood after age 80. This distinction appears to have been evident in Keller's life and is discussed below.

7.7.1. Late Adulthood (65 - 80 years)

As proposed by Levinson (1996), Keller's Late Adulthood too, was a time of decline as well as an opportunity for development. Her continued development is exemplified in the self-reflection she underwent when writing *Teacher*, her continued desire to learn more, and her ability to make peace with the Perkins School for the Blind (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

Initially Keller's health was excellent, but with the passage of time her vigour and abilities declined progressively (Herrmann, 2007; Kleege, 2006). A developmental task of Late Adulthood is to find a new balance of involvement with society and with the self (Levinson, 1996; Levinson et al., 1978; Santrock, 2002). In Keller's case this task seems to have been a gradual process as she did not seem to have a specific retirement date and she continued to campaign for human rights, albeit with a different approach (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). Since Keller had contributed to society through community involvement throughout her life, the researcher is of the opinion that it is unlikely that she created a new sense of self in this manner. However, World War II appears to have created the opportunity for Keller to find meaning in her life. In this way the external aspects (Levinson, 1996) seem to have influenced her development and sense of self.

Whether she ever achieved a sense of belonging is debatable. It is noteworthy however that she became more involved in the plight of the deaf, and it was at this stage of her life that many schools for the deaf-blind were established as a result of Keller's involvement (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956). By so doing she may have

been identifying more closely with those with the same handicaps in an attempt to seek belonging, even if not consciously.

One might assume that the valued work Keller engaged in at this time was the writing of the book *Teacher*, stemming from her need to continue developing, and from her own creative energies rather than from the pressure to make a living and provide for Miss S (Levinson, 1996).

Many of Keller's friends and acquaintances had passed away by this time, and Polly's deteriorating health impacted on Keller's quality of life (Herrmann, 2007). As Levinson (1996) suggests, such physical, psychological and social changes that occur during this period necessitate various changes in lifestyle, and life structure. These changes however only occurred in Keller's mid-to-late 70s.

Levinson (1996) suggests that there may be yet another crisis in this era - that of moving out of centre stage, in both work and family. Keller appears to have had little or no contact with her family, and many of those close to her had already passed away (Herrmann, 2007; Kleege, 2006), hence she maintained centre stage in this area of her life. This appears to have been true for Keller in terms of work, too. As the face of the AFB well into her 70s it appears that Keller's public image continued to have a certain amount of power and she received recognition until her death (American Foundation for the Blind, 1885-1980; Herrmann, 2007). Levinson et al. (1978) claim that should the individual retain power well into Late Adulthood, there is a tendency to be an isolated leader, in poor touch with followers and overly idealised. It can be argued that the latter seems to be so in Keller's case, however she had been idealised throughout most of her life, and her legacy continues.

7.7.2. Late Late Adulthood (80 years - death)

The portrayal of Keller 'the rogue' (Herrmann, 2007) at the age of 80 suggests to the researcher that Keller had successfully managed to establish a new sense of self. Thus meeting another of Levinson et al.'s (1978) developmental tasks.

In Keller's Late Late Adulthood, the process of ageing was more evident than the process of growth in line with what Levinson et al. (1978) postulate. Keller's life structure consisted of minimal correspondence, a few significant relationships and much of her day was directed toward immediate bodily needs and personal comforts (Levinson et al., 1978).

Development at the end of the life cycle, according to Levinson (1996) is the coming to terms with the process of dying and preparing for death. Due to Keller's religious beliefs she had come to terms with death in Early Adulthood. She did not fear death, rather she seemed to look forward to it (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956).

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Keller's unique life components, as well as the similarities and differences between Keller's unique patterns of life and Levinson's life structure theory. In the next chapter, final conclusions are drawn. In addition, limitations of this study are discussed and possible future research is contemplated.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

This, the final chapter of the psychobiographical study of Keller, serves to draw together and summarise the findings and discussions of this study. This chapter also provides an overview of the challenges, limitations, and value of the research. Recommendations for possible future research conclude this chapter.

8.1. Research Summary

This study has explored and described the life of Keller within the framework of Levinson's life structure theory (Levinson, 1996). In this research study the developmental periods, developmental tasks, and two of the interwoven concepts of the theory – satisfactoriness and components of life structure – were employed to study Keller's unique pattern of life structure development as a handicapped woman. In addition, this study has corroborated Levinson's (1996) conceptualisation of development as a progression of four eras and three transitional periods throughout the lifespan of an individual. However, as is to be expected with the application of any formal psychological theory, certain aspects of Keller's life reflect the theory, whereas other aspects deviate from the theoretical propositions. This study suggests that, although she was handicapped and her initial development was severely delayed, her life structure development closely approximated that proposed by Levinson (1996) in many respects.

This study lends evidence to Levinson's theory on life structure development, as well as his assertion that the direction of the life course is influenced by the central, unfilled, and peripheral components of a person's life. These in turn highlight the unique elements of Keller's life. In Keller's case, the two most important central components appear to have been her desire to serve others, and to provide for Miss S. Her choices and decisions seem to have largely revolved around these desires. A third component which appears to have taken a central position in Keller's life was her intimate relationship with books and learning.

Levinson (1996) also asserts that within each component of life structure work is done, choices are made, existing relationships are modified and new ones are established. This may result in the status of components of life structure changing. For example, "one or several components may become central in the life structure,

others may fade away completely, and still others may fluctuate in relative importance before taking a more stable place at the centre or periphery" (Levinson, 1996, p. 25). Here again, Keller appears to have been no exception. Her quest for the acquisition of speech seems to have also been a central component, with Keller expending much energy and effort on this for much of her life. Yet she was unable to attain it, and speech remained an unfilled component of her life.

Similarly, marriage as a life component appears to have shifted position. Marriage seemed to have shifted several times, moving from being an apparently unimportant aspect of Keller's life (i.e. a peripheral life component) to an unfilled life component (i.e. something she wanted but did not attain). For a brief period of time marriage seemed to have been a central component, with Keller investing much time and energy in her relationship with Fagon. However, it appears that Keller consciously placed marriage in the position of peripheral component for the remainder of her life. Other interpersonal relationships, such as those between Keller and her siblings, were also peripheral components and thus had little influence on her life structure development. In contrast, the relationships between Keller and Miss S and Polly, which were central components in her life, clearly illustrate the influence of relationships on life structure development.

Levinson's (1996) proposal, that satisfactoriness can be attained by establishing a life structure that accommodates personal attributes and facilitates the attainment of personal goals, is also illuminated through this study. Keller developed a life structure that enabled her to evolve, and realise her desire to serve others, while minimising developmental crises, as well as promoting a comparatively smooth transition into late adulthood.

Although Levinson (1996) and Levinson et al. (1978) acknowledge that the focus of the theory is on development in Early and Middle Adulthood, this study strongly suggests continued development well into Late Adulthood. The absence of developmental periods in this era indicates a shortcoming in Levinson's development theory.

Keller developed from a severely handicapped infant, a 'phantom in a world of nothingness' (Herrmann, 2007; Keller, 1956), raised in a patriarchal society, into an exceptionally driven and tenacious woman. Not only did Keller manage to overcome the delay in her early development, she also overcame many of the obstacles faced by deaf-blind people of that socio-historical period. She further utilised her strength of

will, optimism, and modified her rebellious nature to serve others. Keller ironically succeeded in giving a voice to those who had none, albeit well into Late Adulthood. Apart from internal aspects (i.e. her characteristics), the external context was also an important contributing factor in her life development. Some of these external aspects included the climate of transformation and progress, as well as the atmosphere of hope and optimism in the early 1900s (Bates, 1976; Sklar, 1992), the feminist movement (Sklar, 1992), and World War II.

This study has described and explored Keller's life within a formal psychological theory, while simultaneously examining the theory. The study has illuminated Keller's unique pattern of life structure development as she evolved according to the general time frames and tasks proposed by Levinson's (1996) theory despite her double handicap. Furthermore, the study adds to the biographical information available on the life of Keller.

8.2. Challenges and Limitations

Many of the challenges and limitations inherent to this type of case-based research were dealt with in Chapter Four. The preliminary ethical and methodological considerations as well as specific steps taken to overcome potential difficulties were discussed. Despite these measures, several challenges and limitations are noteworthy.

This study on Keller's life is to be recognised within the constraints of a master's treatise. The vast amount of information available on Keller coupled to the saintly public image portrayed by many writers posed a particular challenge in the exploration of the underlying pattern of her life. Due to the limited scope of this master's treatise to study Keller, certain information has not been included in this study. Little attention could be given to all the books and numerous articles she produced, and in-depth detail of how she dealt with her double handicap could also not be explored. Such information could have provided additional insight into the experiences she was undergoing at the time she wrote each article or book. Despite the many sources of data available, two books the researcher believes could have enriched this study could not be obtained. These are *Journal* by Keller, and *Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy,* a highly recommended biography by Joseph Lash ("Talk with Joseph Lash", 1980).

This treatise has not made explicit the extent of Keller's ability to adapt and modify various aspects of her life that led to her satisfactoriness. In addition, the

researcher was constantly mindful of the immensity of Keller's challenges, often being amazed and perplexed by her achievements. This resulted in the researcher vacillating between admiration (similar to that of Keller's protagonists), and suspicion (similar to that of her critics), becoming frustrated by public prejudice while simultaneously acknowledging the incomprehensible ability of this extraordinary individual.

The aim of a psychobiography is to explore and describe an individual's life in its holistic complexity, taking into account the biopsychosocial context. The scope of this study has however limited such a detailed exploration, but the choice of psychological theory used in this study allowed for a narrower focus on life structure development, satisfactoriness and life components. An attempt has been made to explore these aspects throughout Keller's life in a holistic manner. It is noted, however, that these do not fully account for her whole life experience or the total contribution she made to the plight of the marginalised and in particular to the lives of the deaf and blind, then and now.

Levinson's (1996) theory does not fully account for development into Late Adulthood. As such, this limited the detailed exploration of Keller's life structure development during this era. Levinson's theory also does not emphasise the influence spirituality can have on a life. Therefore, this study suggests that Levinson's (1996) theory requires expansion.

8.3. Value of the Study

This study adds to the psychobiographical research conducted both in South Africa and on handicapped women. Although a comparative analysis was not the focus of this study, the unique life structure and pattern of development of Keller as a handicapped person, living in the first half of the twentieth century, was compared with that of non-handicapped individuals of the late twentieth century.

This study has examined the theoretical content of Levinson's (1996) life structure theory of development throughout an entire lifespan. Keller's productivity into Late Adulthood indicates the need to develop the theory particularly in the era of Late Adulthood. The study has also reiterated the importance of viewing each life as unique. It has illustrated that, although there is universality in similar developmental stages and tasks through which individuals evolve, the underlying pattern of life structure is uniquely developed. In Keller's case the absence of obvious development

between two and six years of age and her profound handicaps are not accounted for in Levinson's (1996) theory. This in itself suggests a need for a unique life structure, yet her life course approximated the developmental eras and transitions of the theory.

One of the questions asked when selecting a subject for a psychobiographical study is: 'How do certain individuals develop, and become exceptionally productive, competent and creative?' This study suggests that in Keller's case, like that of many other well-known individuals such as Karen Horny (Green, 2006), Mother Teresa (Stroud, 2004), and Nancy Charton (van Genechten, 2007), her extraordinary achievements are closely related to the central components of her life.

Finally, but not of least importance, describing and exploring Keller's life within a formal theoretical framework has revealed both the usefulness of developmental theory as well as making explicit the uniqueness of individuals. The researcher is thus of the opinion that engaging in psychobiographical research is an excellent exercise in psychological training.

8.4. Recommended Future Research

The utilisation of different formal psychological theories could provide alternative perspectives and further information on Keller's life. One such theory is James Fowler's (1981) faith development theory. This theory may reveal other dimensions of her development. Another psychological theory that could shed an alternative view on Keller's life is Alfred Adler's (1907) *Studie über Minderwertigkeit von Organen* (i.e. Study of organ inferiority and its psychical compensation). This could explore whether Keller compensated psychologically for her disabilities, and her 'social interest drive' ("Alfred Adler", 2009).

In addition, to increase the reliability of this study, a similar study could be conducted. As mentioned in section 8.1. of this chapter, a master's treatise limits the scope and depth of such a study, thus the researcher is of the opinion that a more in-depth study such as a doctoral thesis would be beneficial. The latter could include the work produced by Keller, as well as investigate the influence her handicaps had on the relationships she formed, and the choices she made. Furthermore, such a study could add to the validity of the research findings in this study.

Lastly, Keller's productivity and continued development during her Late Adulthood suggests the presence of developmental periods within this era. The extended life expectancy of individuals nowadays provides the opportunity for a

similar study to that conducted by Levinson. However, the study sample should be productive men and women in the age group 65 and older.

Conclusion

The psychobiographical research approach was employed to conduct this qualitative research study. In light of the above mentioned challenges and limitations the primary and secondary aims of this study have been largely achieved. It has attempted to describe and explore Keller's life within the framework of Levinson's life structure theory. The aims were to investigate Keller's entire life in a holistic manner, taking into account the biopsychosocial aspects that contributed to the development of her unique life structure.

The longitudinal nature of the theory provided a useful framework for development throughout the lifespan of an individual. The complexity of Keller's life however exceeds the scope of this treatise, and it is thus that the developmental stages and tasks, as well as the life components and satisfactoriness formed the focus of this study.

In conclusion, this study suggests that Keller, although deaf and blind, moved through many of the universal stages of development proposed by Levinson's (1996) life structure theory, while evolving a unique life structure. It also suggests that Keller's development was characterised by a well-defined dedication to serve others, as well as a very well-developed capacity to adapt regardless of her handicaps. This, in the researcher's view, reveals her to have been a remarkable and extraordinary woman.

Finally, this study has confirmed and refuted certain aspects of the theory. By so doing it has contributed to the development of the theoretical constructs of this psychological theory.

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of Helen Suzman who in the dark days of apartheid did. more than any other person to keep liberal values alive in. South Africa. Helen Suzman is no political demagogue, no armchair crusader. During her 36 years in parliament. she was a â€œhands-onâ€ politician and tenacious ﬁghter for. Helen Keller - Helen Keller was born in 1880 in Escumbria, Alabama. She learned to talk at an early age of 6 months. She walked when she was 1 year old. However, when she was 19 months old, after a severe fever , her mother noticed that she could neither hear or see. She was blind and deaf for the rest of her life.Â Helen Keller wrote an autobiography called The Story of My Life. The book was made into a movie and helped many people realize that they could still learn even if they had physical problems. Helen Keller died in 1968. She had received many awards for her hard work for those people who were blind or deaf or had other handicaps. She showed by her own life that no matter what problem a person has, she can overcome it with lots of hard work.