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Reflection #3

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Recently in Theory, we have been discussing symbolic interactionism and its connection to our everyday lives. This reflection will cover the definition of symbolic interactionism along with its development. I will then relate the theory to a topic that I'm learning in another class. The class I will be using as an example is the Sociology of (Dis)ability, that I'm taking with Dr. Milne. To begin I would like to introduce the history of symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism was defined in class as, an "ongoing exchange of symbols in social interactions." These symbols can either be shown through symbols such as signs or physical actions like facial expressions. We use these symbols throughout our everyday occurrences, and it gives us the ability to gain social skills, navigate life efficiently and comply with social norms. We can observe these symbols within the early stages of life, for example most infants are able to smile at the age of 3 months. There are later stages of social interactions that occur that were developed by George Hurbert Mead.

Mead introduced a concept called, "The Self," which is essentially a judgment of oneself through self-evaluation. There are also two components to "The Self" which are the "Me" and "I." The "Me" portion represents the internalized views made by others. This instance happens when a positive or negative comment is made by a peer, then lingers in the mind of the individual the comment was made toward. The comment made could then either improve or decrease one's confidence. The "I" factor serves as self-conception and the self being introduced out of a social interaction. Mead also noted that there are three stages of "The Self."

The first is the "Preparatory Stage" that occurs between the ages of 0-3. This is when children imitate the actions of older adults in their lives. Children in this age range are comparable to sponges and soak up what's around their environment whether that would be clapping, or even cussing. The "Play Stage" occurs between the ages of 3-5 and explains that children adopt play roles as doctors, firefighters, "mommies", etc. Children can explore influential occupations and roles they deem as important or interesting. The final stage is the "Game Stage" that happens at the ages of 6-9. Children become accustomed to the relationships associated with rules involved in games. Not all kids have a concept of playing a game correctly, their main goal is to win which results in them making up rules as they go along.

To conclude, I would like to relate symbolic interactionism to my Sociology of (Dis)ability class. Our instructor had given us an assignment to go throughout all Longwood buildings and point out the lack of accommodation within them. My team and I found multiple faults that included a minimum of handicap accessible signage, lack of raised symbols signifying stairs/classroom numbers, and a lack of wheelchair access. Without these symbols and signs, it makes it difficult for students and staff with disabilities to navigate throughout campus. That goes to show just how important symbolic interactionism is within our everyday lives.