

3. Examine the sources of your self-concept.
4. Discover life experiences that were instrumental in developing your own self-esteem.

A CASE STUDY IN SELF-CONCEPT

Ben's Dilemma

Ben was from a small community. He lived with his parents and an older brother. During his early school years, Ben frequently had teachers who had also taught his brother, Dan. These teachers usually acknowledged Ben's older brother, but never allowed that to interfere with the relationship they developed with Ben.

Ben was an extroverted person who enjoyed the company of friends. He had a few friends in all of his classes. In the classes Ben enjoyed and found interesting, he did very well. In other classes that he found less interesting, he did average work. Ben was a solid B student.

One day a situation developed in Mary Woods' physical education class, causing her to question the appropriateness of Ben's behavior. Ms. Woods' reaction to Ben was, "Why can't you behave more like your brother Dan did in my class?" This reaction caught Ben completely by surprise. No other teacher had ever compared him to Dan. Ben assured Ms. Woods that he was his own person and not like Dan. Ms. Woods responded that since Dan was such a fine student in class and never caused problems, it might be to Ben's advantage to try to be more like him.

Ben was distraught over Ms. Woods' comparison of him to his brother. Despite his feelings, he tried to be positive in subsequent classes and did quite well. At the same time he tried to emphasize to Ms. Woods that he was not like his brother.

At mid-semester the class finished a Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) unit. Ben found the unit very interesting and enjoyed learning the information. He passed the performance part of the final unit exam, and decided to study with a friend for the written exam. Ben was motivated to do well on the test, and studied the day before the test with his friend Mike. Class members were allowed to sit on the gym floor as they took the test. Mike and Ben sat together. A week later when the tests were returned, Mike and Ben did not receive theirs. When Ben asked Ms. Woods about his test, she accused him and Mike of cheating since they had received two of the highest grades. Ms. Woods pointed out to Ben that his brother Dan would never have performed such an act of dishonesty, and then escorted Ben and Mike to the principal's office.

Ben and Mike stood by their story and, when asked about the closeness of their grades, explained that they studied together for the test. Ms. Woods did not accept their explanation, and asked that they retake the test. They did as she requested and received grades almost identical

to the first test grades. Ms. Woods concluded the reason for the high test scores was that either one or both of them had access to the original test before it was given. She refused to accept their test scores.

From then on, Ben's behavior in the course changed drastically. For the remainder of the semester, he did everything in his power to make the class total misery for Ms. Woods. He started arguments with her and was repeatedly sent to the principal's office. The situation escalated to the point that one day Ms. Woods told Ben school was no place for him, and he would not amount to anything in life regardless of what he did.

Discussion Questions

1. How did Ms. Woods' reaction to Ben affect how he perceived himself?
2. Why did Ben's behavior in the class change after the incident?
3. Have you ever experienced a situation like the one Ben and Mike experienced? What happened? Did your behavior change as a result of others' perceptions of you?
4. Do you think Ben was successful or unsuccessful in later life? What reasons do you have for your prediction?