

CASE STUDY¹

It's Saturday morning in the Franklin home.* Breakfast is rushed because Marty, who is 12 years old, and his sister Rhonda, 9, have early soccer games. Their mother, Donna, is scurrying around while her husband, Troy, eats and reads the morning paper. Marty grumbles to his mother, "Ma, hurry up! I told you last week, the coach picks the starting players 20 minutes before game time." His mother snaps back, "If you had washed your uniform last night like I asked you to, we wouldn't be in such a hurry." Rhonda pipes in, "I did mine."

Marty shoots his sister a dirty look and says, "Oh, I guess I just can't compete with goody two-shoes here. Hey, maybe my soccer suit is dirty, but at least I don't get the Bitch of the Year Award." Donna reacts sternly, saying, "Don't talk that way to your sister, young man!" Troy now glances up from his paper, annoyed.

"How the hell do you expect Marty to react? If he's not absolutely perfect, both of you are all over him." "Never mind, Dad," Marty breaks in flippantly, "I'm used to it. If one of them isn't bitching at me, it's the other." Donna's blood begins to boil as Troy returns to reading. "Your son just called me a bitch. You're his father—you have nothing to say about it?" Troy half rises out of his seat. "Yeah, I do have something to say. If you would conduct yourself like an adult, instead of getting all hysterical, things wouldn't get like this with the children. Don't be so damn sensitive. Marty didn't call you a bitch, he said you bitch at him, which is true. You do."

Marty laughs. Rhonda does too, then immediately feels ashamed toward her mother and turns red in the face. Their mother yells loudly at Troy, "It's not me! You're the problem here, you're just encouraging his bad attitude!"

Troy pounces out of his seat yelling back, "That's enough out of you, you goddamned bitch!" Troy then hurls his newspaper to the floor and shoves Donna hard toward the kitchen door so that she stumbles and falls. "Get the hell out of here, right now," he screams, "or you'll be sorry!"

Donna bursts into tears and runs up to the bedroom. Marty and Rhonda are left trembling, although Marty forces a smile and mumbles to Rhonda, "What the hell does Mom expect?"

Questions for discussion:

1. In what ways does Troy undermine Donna's authority?
2. What might be the impact of Troy's assault on Donna in terms of her future ability to protect her daughter? How might that affect Rhonda's view of her mother?
3. How does Troy sow divisions within the family?
4. What kind of behavior is Troy modeling for his children?
5. How does he use them as vehicles of control?

¹ Bancroft and Silverman