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Mari Castañeda, Amherst, Massachusetts
Kirsten Isgro, Plattsburgh, New York
INTRODUCTION

Speaking Truth to Power to Change the Ivory Tower

Mari Castañeda and Kirsten Isgro

WE MET in the autumn of 2000 in western Massachusetts, when both of us were embarking on new academic journeys: Mari was beginning her first professorial job fresh out of graduate school (a Chicana from the University of California–San Diego), with a five-year-old son in tow, and Kirsten was returning to her doctoral studies after a decade-long hiatus from graduate school. Mari relocated her family from Los Angeles, and Kirsten relocated from Vermont with her partner of five years and her aging dog. Both of us became parents while in graduate school, albeit with a fifteen-year age gap and at different points of our lives. Like most of us who become parents, we did not fully anticipate the delight, exhaustion, intense love, ambivalence, and distress that come with raising a child.

It is not coincidental that this project was spawned at a time when notions of motherhood were once again being contested at the turn of the twenty-first century. In 2004, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels’s witty and controversial book The Mommy Myth came out, quickly becoming a best-seller. As communication scholars, we found this book incredibly useful in its critical assessment of the cultural representations of mothers in the media. This “new momism,” as Douglas and Michaels call it, “is a set of ideals, norms, and practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seem on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgate standards of perfection that are beyond your reach” (5). How does this momism affect women professionally, especially those of us who have chosen careers in higher education? For many of the authors who contributed to this anthology, life as a parent and as an employee in institutes of higher