# EPILOGUE

## Final Reflections

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A DECADE into the twenty-first century, the ideals of a stable job market and family-friendly policies are in disarray due to the near U.S. economic meltdown and the dismantling of public-policy initiatives birthed during the civil rights movement. Over the three years we have been working on this book project, large grassroots uprisings have taken place around the world, and people are justifiably upset about the deep inequities in society. Much of the current financial crisis we see on Wall Street is reverberating in our academic halls as well (Ross 2009). It is statistically complicated to compare senior executive and chief functional officers at public and private colleges and universities with the various ranks of professors, lecturers, staff, and students across disciplines. However, the average presidential pay rose faster than full-time faculty salaries from 2007 to 2011, with the average increase being 11.5 percent for the former compared to 5.4 percent for the latter (American Association of University Professors [AAUP] 2011). According to a 2010–2011 survey conducted by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources, median base salary for a president/CEO at a single institution ranged from $167,895 at community colleges to $385,000 at doctorate-granting institutions (2). The average annual salary of full-time faculty members in 2010–2011 across institutions and academic rank was one-quarter or less of administrative salaries (AAUP 2011). Staff salaries are unfortunately also low.

Long-time scholar and commentator on higher education and activism Cary Nelson has noted that the increasingly bloated salaries of higher-edu-

cation administrators is at the expense and exploitation of part-timers, graduate employees, and campus support staff. He notes, "Higher education has adopted the robber baron values of late nineteenth-century capitalism: treat workers as disposable and do everything possible to maximize profits; behave like nothing else matters" (1997, 252). As AAUP president, Nelson is well aware of how such exploitation erodes higher education's moral status. At a time when unions in general are in decline in the United States and academic unions in particular are under attack (as witnessed in the state of Wisconsin in 2011), there is undoubtedly concern for many of us working and studying at colleges and universities across the country. As some of the authors in this book discussed, academic unions have played an important role in addressing some of the inequities that parents (mothers in particular) face in the academy. The decline of unions and limited collective-bargaining capabilities should be a significant concern for faculty. In 2011, the Chronicle of Higher Education ran a special forum on the future of faculty unions ("Forum" 2011), suggesting that this period is a historical moment of state and local economic downturns and large-scale corporatization. Interestingly, absent from this forum was any discussion as to how the assault on unions and public education is not only classed, but also highly gendered and racialized. In short, it is a critical time for mothers in the academy to speak up—hence the need for this book.

The statistics shared throughout this book refer to the fact that many women (and mothers) make up a larger portion of the contingent and part-time workforce in academia, even at a time when more women and students of color are entering college. In many ways, this trend is a sign of perhaps the larger restructuring of education within a global marketplace. In this context, learning is treated as an undersold commodity and students as consumers of a weightless product. As the mothers' narratives in this collection attest, we are living with multiple and contradictory relations of power in the policies and practices of higher education. Some of these practices are of our own making, but others are deeply embedded in our institutions' academic structures and organizational cultures. In fact, many of the institutional biases and injustices shared by the authors here reveal that the "power of dominant ideological systems lies in the ability to *construct the very terms upon which we stake our resistance*" (Cotera 2010, 335, emphasis in original). The personal stories of mothers working in academia allow us to see "schooling relationally" (Apple 1996, 4). That is, we bear witness to how education is fundamentally connected to the struggles and compro-

mises related to the domination of and resistance to bureaucratization as well as to the ill treatment that exists in the larger society (Tuchman 2009; Cotera 2010).

The struggles faced by women in the academy manifest themselves in the chapter authors' discourses. Although it may be perceived that a "rhetoric of choice" is present in the chapters, to situate each of the women's narratives in this anthology as involving "private choices" is to miss the larger neoliberal ideals and values that focus so much on the individual as a way to divert larger oppressive structures. Choice can certainly operate as a strategy for women to maintain a feeling of being independent and liberated agents free of gender constraints of prior generations, but it also has detrimental effects (McCarver 2011). Our choices do not occur in isolation because we often make them accompanied by social pressures and judgments as well as by institutional rules. As Virginia McCarver notes in her analysis of discourses about career, motherhood, and family, "Choice rhetoric can be dangerous to women because it obscures a reality of limited choices, assigns blame and individual responsibility to women alone for the outcome of their choices" (2011, 33). In the context of faculty members' finding their departments threatened with downsizing or closure or having limited parental-leave policies or child-care options or being denied tenure or earning less than their male colleagues, it becomes apparent that "choice" may simply be a way to guise a series of poor alternatives and double-binds that working mothers find themselves facing in academia and beyond. Rather than discuss some of the choices women have made as mothers working in academia, some of the authors in this volume have employed what can be viewed as a "rhetoric of sacrifice," which addresses what these women forfeited as a result of gender inequity beyond their control. And although the rhetoric of sacrifice may be considered as less empowering, it can be a useful concept for exposing the structural absence of good choices (McCarver 2011). Cultural narratives that highly value individual freedom and personal autonomy are laden with narrow scripts of gendered experiences of work and family, and women who embody motherhood have a series of limiting alternatives, especially when the latter are compared to the choices available to men. The rhetoric of choice is held in tension with recognition of barriers and oppression that many mothers experience in academia. Thus, when we as parents discuss the partial choices, the institutional and social limitations, and the career paths and opportunities we may forfeit as a result of child rearing, we as contributors to this anthology are calling into question and are resisting how

"sacrifices" are often expected and lauded by institutionalized motherhood. As communication scholars and editors of this anthology, we want to challenge the sacrifice of perfect motherhood and would rather heed to Virginia McCarver's call to turn on its head the "rhetoric of sacrifice[,] [which] may serve to address issues of gender inequity concerning family and work as well as possible additional alternatives to the rhetoric of choice" (2011, 37).

Beyond the rhetoric of choice and sacrifice, what this collection's *testimonios* reveal is the larger project of making "campuses moral workplaces" (Nelson 1997, 258). There have been stories in these pages about women who refuse to be isolated from their colleagues or to act as agents of oppression toward their students, staff, or other faculty. There are other stories where women have experienced overt hostility from other academic women. Some women have successfully created alternative networks and space within the academy where they can share their learning, teaching, and coping strategies. Some women have figured out how to find allies for the task of balancing the intersectional identity "mother in the academy." Social transformation is slow, yet the stories shared by the fierce female scholars in this anthology reveal the hope as well as the diversity of the struggles and triumphs surrounding motherhood in academia.

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