

Good Intentions And White Middle-Class Femininities: Negotiating Privilege In The Social Enterprise

by Helen Taylor

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Dr Kyoung-Hee Yu

University of Technology Sydney
UTS Business School

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Certificate Of Original Authorship

I, Helen Lind Taylor, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the UTS Business School at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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Preface

My study of Warm Hearts as an organisation was shaped from the first coffee meeting I took with the CEO in the lead up to formalising our agreement for me to spend 12 months with them. A PhD candidate new to ethnography as a method, I was taking care to ensure it was clear what my study required in terms of access while also working to build a rapport from that first iced flat white. We spoke of the state of the social welfare sector and Warm Hearts' recipients, but we spent just as much time speaking openly about the challenges of running a social enterprise that was at that point just over two years old. After some time embedded in the organisation, I reflected on this first meeting and recognised that I had been casually interviewed, and evidently shown myself to be a good fit.

My ethnographic study of Warm Hearts called on me to bring much of myself to the work. It was important to my participants to understand me, and for me to 'make sense' to them as a researcher. Communicating that I was a good fit was partly simply showing up as a white, middle-class, tertiary-educated woman. I also drew on a set of skills I had developed by way of this positionality; I was equal parts encouraging, enthusiastic, empathetic. I was able to imply openness without sharing more personal information than seemed necessary to complement what my participants would later share with me between meetings, as asides, in those moments as we waited for everyone to log in to Zoom. Once fieldwork began, my participants quickly shifted from seeing me as a researcher to seeing me as one of them; they would share book and podcast recommendations they "knew I would love". When they shifted from speaking about their children and husbands to ask me about my family, my identity as a queer woman was framed in heteronormativity by a tendency to describe my dogs as my "fur babies". They made sense of me to themselves.

I had never seen or thought about my own whiteness, middle-class status, and femininity in terms of community building like this before. I recognised the spaces and disclosures this positionality opened up in new ways, where shorthand and assumed

consensus spoke more of our shared privileges than any careful articulation of capital P 'Privilege' ever could. This positionality is one that has historically made it hard for me to see my privilege. My background in gender studies gave me a firm stance as a feminist from my early 20s, and I consumed the work of white women advocating equal pay, bodily autonomy, safety in the streets and in our homes. I was passionate, my own writing calling for change and decrying the patriarchy. I drew from lived experiences to bolster my righteousness, and I was applauded for the words I had to share. Since this time, it is bell hooks' (1984) *Feminist Theory: From Margin To Center* that first shook loose my insistent grip on my white middle-class womanhood-as-oppression. Learning how whiteness and middle-class status are seen and understood as privileges by those who do not hold them is one piece of the work. Learning to see myself as privileged and recognise my own whiteness, for example, is another altogether. Finally, learning how to bring my passion for challenging inequality into a new realm of possibility, the shared work of dismantling the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, is the world of a lifetime. Of my lifetime.

Encountering my own whiteness and middle-class privilege through this ethnography has been a determined practice of tarrying with discomfort (Yancy, 2015). My thesis presents my research as a linear story, but my starkly privileged experience of being somehow *surprised* by whiteness and all the 'messiness' that race encompasses (Yancy, 2012) is what I have endeavoured to be truthful to in my contributions. My initial intention was to study and subsequently celebrate Warm Hearts for the ways their work might inspire, but this gave way somewhat unexpectedly to a range of frustrations with the organisation. Exploring these frustrations has made clear to me the ways that I too have both perpetuated and been compliant with dominator culture (hooks, 2013). I believe my contributions are all the richer for these tensions. This work is personal; in various sections of this thesis, I implicate myself when I speak of white people. This is purposeful. I do not separate myself from the project as a dispassionate, objective researcher but instead involve myself and my own experiences in my work. I find that my queerness has been helpful in making clear to me the ways in which I do not 'fit', and how this can be constructive (Taylor, 2020), but this part of my identity

does not exist separately from other parts. Throughout my thesis, I find it more helpful to build my contributions from a place that holds privileges of whiteness and wealth to careful attention.

This thesis finds me concentrated on the work of dismantling the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. My wonderful supervisors Helena Liu and Kyoung-Hee Yu have helped me to stay clear on my intention to be hard on these systems of oppression and inequality, but soft on the people I have studied. I recognise that working under dominator culture often presents us with limited options. My participants have been generous with their experiences, and I am grateful to Warm Hearts for all I learned there.

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACNC	Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
AGM	Annual General Meeting
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COO	Chief Operations Officer
DV	Domestic Violence
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LGA	Local Geographic Area
MOS	Management And Organisation Studies
WIP	Work In Progress

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial pursuits appear to offer the promise of success to all. The possibilities inherent in building a business and working outside of hierarchical organisations and traditional roles are fascinating and compelling. A substantial body of scholarship on gender inequality in the critical entrepreneurship field explores entrepreneurship as socially constructed; a gendered practice. More recently, scholars in the field have reflected that research is largely focused on gender and the gendering of organisations, and call for a critical approach that looks beyond gender to consider race and class. Nkomo's (1992) call to re-write race into organisations implores critical scholars to incorporate race in their work as a central analytical category. My thesis answers this call by beginning from the assumption that race and class are central to critical contributions alongside gender.

For this project, I undertook a digital ethnography over 12 months, studying Warm Hearts, a social enterprise in its third year of operations. My thesis examines the reflection and reproduction of power structures in the social enterprise, defining these structures as white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. I address the complexity of race, class, and gender as social categories through a conceptual framework that incorporates postfeminism and critical whiteness studies. My project incorporates digital ethnography as a novel methodological approach to critical entrepreneurship studies. My contribution is drawn from studying online and digital spaces, reinterpreting the 'field' of social entrepreneurship.

My thesis examines the social enterprise as a site that reflects and reproduces systems of oppression, shaped by structures of power. Discourses of 'opportunity discovery' see the social enterprise capitalising on the needs of marginalised people, where the prioritisation of innovation contributes to their objectification. The negotiation of race, class, and gender for my participants makes social entrepreneurship a complex practice. Empowerment is pursued as a right, and privilege sits in tension with disadvantage. I challenge the ways women are reduced to one-dimensional traits of

'sharing and caring' in the social entrepreneurship scholarship (Lewis & Henry, 2019) by arguing my participants' work is shaped by a complex relationship to power.

The inclusion of class and gender is key to re-writing race into organisations. This project lays bare structures of white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. With more nuanced understanding of the complexities of power come new opportunities for co-conspiratorship and the dismantling of inequality.