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## STORIES OF GOOD WORKS: THE ROLE OF AESTHETICS IN LEGITIMIZING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS (SUMMARY)

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## ≈ SUMMARY ≈

**STORIES OF GOOD WORKS: THE ROLE OF AESTHETICS  
IN LEGITIMIZING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS**

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**Principal Topic**

One of the central challenges of social entrepreneurship is managing the tensions between social and economic missions, particularly since social entrepreneurs are often forced, even if only temporarily, to compromise one logic over the other to achieve their goals. Giving the appearance of preferring one logic may threaten a venture's legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders who value the sacrificed logic. To address this threat, prior research has found social entrepreneurs often engage in legitimacy maintenance activities, such as drawing upon "heroic narratives" to describe themselves and their histories. If done well, by projecting themselves as a classic "hero," social entrepreneurs can divert attention away from the compromise, focusing stakeholders' attention on the familiar narrative. However, if not done well, stakeholders could possibly see through the impression management efforts. Given this risk of being an overacting actor or delegitimized, what remains is an open question of how different narrative themes and structures centered on promoting a "heroic view of social entrepreneurs" shape the view of stakeholders. Specifically, whether variance in how stories are told enable social entrepreneurs to deflect attention away from areas where they must manage trade-offs.

**Method**

To explore these questions, we use applied media aesthetics, a novel qualitative methodology, to analyze a documentary film series focusing on social entrepreneurs to identify how the latent grammatical rules of film production are used as a tool to draw viewers' attention away from instances when the social entrepreneurs in the film are either forced or choose to compromise to one logic over the other.

**Results and Implications**

Based on our analysis, we found a range of aesthetic strategies utilized to minimize the tensions for viewers inherent in prioritizing one logic at the expense of the other. Specifically, we observed a general pattern between the magnitude of the competition between the two logics and the appeal to heroic narratives such that as the competition increased, the appeal to heroic narrative increased as well. Additionally, we observed this relationship was extenuated when the activity of the social entrepreneur was novel. This research provides insight into the ways in which social entrepreneurs navigate the challenges of hybrid identity.

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