

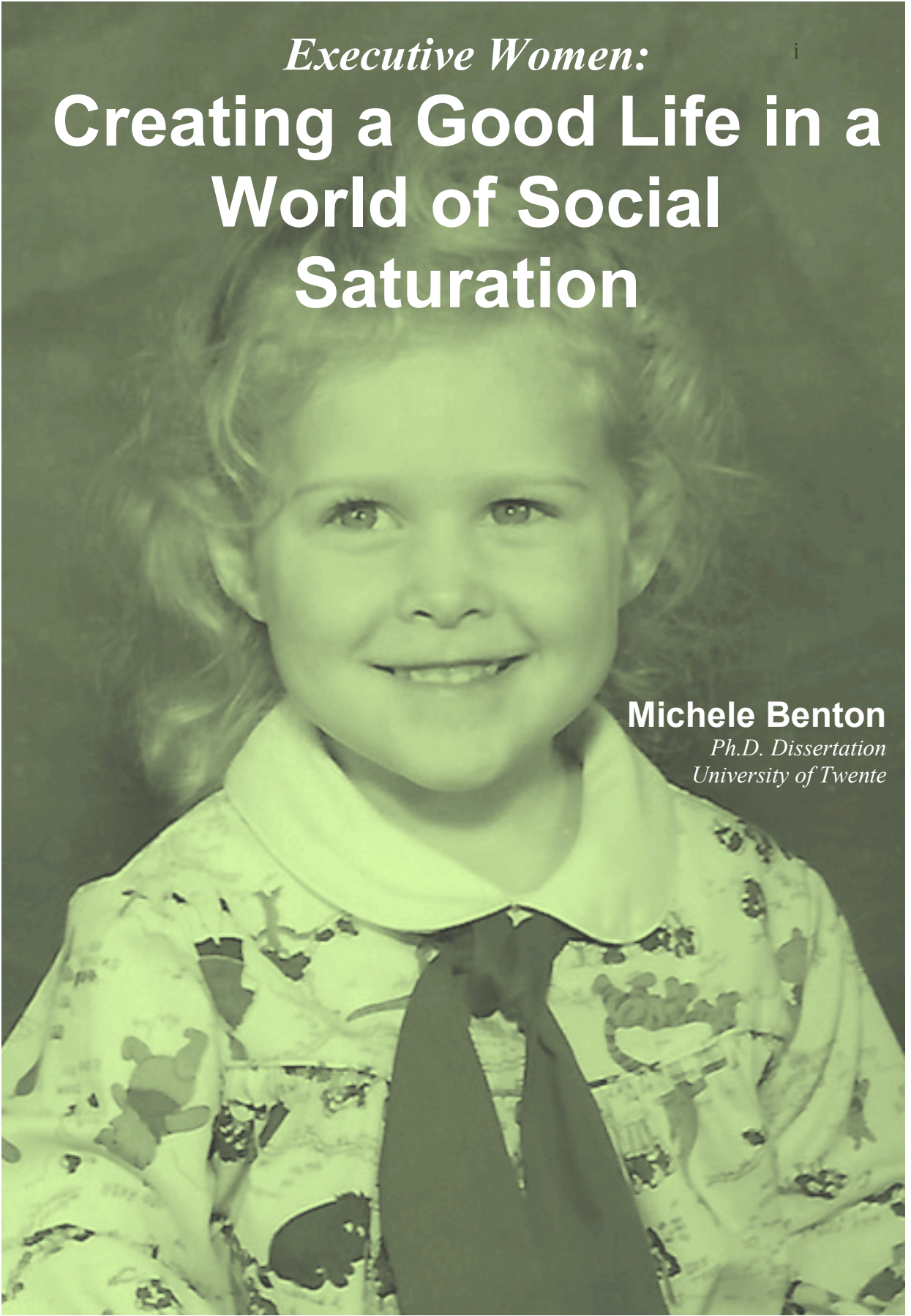
Executive Women:

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Creating a Good Life in a World of Social Saturation

Michele Benton

*Ph.D. Dissertation
University of Twente*



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Prof. dr. T. A. J. Toonen, University of Twente

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Dr. D. Whitney, Corporation for Positive Change, USA

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Prof. dr. T. J. Thatchenkery, George Mason University, USA

**EXECUTIVE WOMEN:
CREATING A GOOD LIFE
IN A WORLD OF SOCIAL SATURATION**

DISSERTATION

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the degree of doctor at the University of Twente,
on the authority of the rector magnificus,
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on account of the decision of the graduation committee,
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by

Michele Benton

born on the 7th of June, 1970
in San Antonio, Texas, USA

This dissertation has been approved by:

Prof. dr. C. P. M. Wilderom (Supervisor)

Dr. D. Whitney (Co-Supervisor)

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ABSTRACT

In pursuing their good life, American executive women today enjoy more choices than at any other time in history, yet they encounter continuing challenges living and working in a world of social saturation. This relational overload makes it difficult to manage their multiple roles, and for many, the experience of social saturation creates impossible expectations as a surround sound of unhelpful, mixed messages vie to shape their lives: Be a Man—Have It All, Superwoman—Don't Be a Man—Be Consistent—Never Mind, Opt-Out. Executive women are in need of a viable script for successfully navigating a relationally demanding world.

In my research, I attempt to address this need by asking: How can executive women create a good life in a world of social saturation? Using autoethnography, I conducted a reflexive examination of five performances in my life—as business leader, daughter, mother, wife, and creative being. In so doing, I surfaced a new, generative story about one's self as relational performances thriving in a world of social saturation, where the good life is embodied in action, or something we “do” in an ongoing way with others. I also identified eight relational practices that hold potential to create a good life: 1.) *Emphasize Relational Resonance*, 2.) *Generate Prosocial Surroundings*, 3.) *Bring Family Out of the Shadows*, 4.) *Negotiate Velvet Ropes*, 5.) *Speak Truth to Power*, 6.) *Use Tools for Co-Planning*, 7.) *Co-Create Relational Rituals*, and 8.) *Tap into Your Inner Network*.

The research findings may be useful for executive women looking to create their own good life, and for employers and work/family policy makers seeking improvements for members in their institutions. I offer that this dissertation impacts both prevailing theory and practice. It adds a fresh perspective to the limited body of research on executive women and the contemporary context of social saturation, offering scholars in leadership, organizational behavior, sociology, and women's studies potential new directions for study. It also challenges conventions in company policies and practice, including leadership development and flexible work programs, as well as in executive women's own approach to growth and betterment.

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