

**Voicelessness and the Media: when
sexuality secrets become public property**

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Certificate of Authority and originality

I certify that this thesis has not been submitted for any degrees anywhere else and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degrees.

I also certify that this thesis was written by me and that any help I have received in preparing it, and all sources used, are acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Abstract

As with most non-traditional PhD dissertations, this work comprises two parts: a professional creative component, in this case of literary journalism; and an exegetical research component.

Part one, *Speaking Secrets*, is a non-fiction manuscript which explores voicelessness and the media. It focuses on sexuality secrets and explores what happens when these secrets become public property. Each chapter is written in a literary journalistic style. The genre is used here to intimately explore stories which have – for various reasons – fallen below the radar of mainstream journalism, despite some prior media exposure.

The manuscript sets out to re-tell the subjects' stories, and in that re-telling, determines to give each a voice. Taken together, these stories – written in the literary journalism genre, in accord with the subjects – amount to a form of advocacy journalism. As such, the manuscript also considers what motivates each subject to speak, and the costs associated with telling their secrets.

Part two of this dissertation, *The Literary Journalist and Degrees of Detachment – an ethical investigation*, investigates the complexities of the relationship between the writer and the subject. It also does so in the context of the literary journalism genre, examining the role and influence of the narrator in the telling of a subject's story.

Further, it considers the various methods of maintaining differing degrees of detachment within the writer/subject relationship and against other factors such as

ethical journalistic practice and the journalist's role in upholding notions such as public interest and the public's right to know.

Within this investigation of ethical imperatives, the notion of 'objectivity' as it pertains to literary journalism, is examined. This dissertation argues that aiming for accuracy, balance and fairness, in the name of public interest and the public's right to know, is a credo all journalists should aspire to. To position these terms within the umbrella meaning of the word 'objectivity' must not be regarded as antithetical to journalism practice, but something worth practising and teaching. This dissertation argues that rigid adherence to the literal meaning of the word 'objectivity' is the downfall of the practice. It is argued that there must be a loosening of the semantics surrounding the debate.

The dissertation considers three texts/case studies to demonstrate the spectrum of degrees of detachment writers can maintain. Each text clearly falls at differing points along this spectrum, as do the stories in the manuscript *Speaking Secrets*.

Empathy of the journalist plays a crucial role in the collecting and telling of these stories. Empathy as a notion is almost regarded as anathema to the journalistic industry. This dissertation argues, and exhibits through the execution of the text *Speaking Secrets*, that empathy is an effective and valid tool of the trade. Indeed, in some instances, it makes for better, more thorough and honest journalism.