

Media Arts Education in the Post-Racial Classroom: An Interview with Janaya Greene About the Short Film, *Veracity*

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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 2013, during her senior year at Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy in South Side Chicago, Janaya Greene wrote the screenplay for the short film, *Veracity*, in her film study class. With the support of their teacher, Mr. Eugene Hazzard, Janaya and her classmates participated in Scenarios USA's curriculum and national writing competition (www.scenariosusa.org). Middle and high school students in Chicago, New York, and Cleveland wrote stories and screenplays in response to the question, What's the Real Deal About Power and Place? Along with winning submissions from New York and Cleveland, a national selection committee chose *Veracity* to be transformed into a short film. *Veracity* explores what it means to come out in high school from the point of view of two African American female characters. In this interview, screen writer Greene talks with art education professor Karyn Sandlos about how media stereotypes shaped her experiences growing up, and how a film about same sex desire and friendship between two young Black women is provoking critical conversations amongst audiences of middle and high school students.

Keywords: media education, art education, stereotypes, sexuality, gender, race, LGBTQ relationships, curriculum, teaching and learning.

"The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different, rather than how we are similar."
—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*, 2009

The 2008 election of the first African American president of the United States prompted debate over whether or not this historic moment signaled a decisive "post-racial" move in the direction of equality. In the wake of the election of President Obama, the media discourse of post-racial America became a prominent framing device in a national conversation about race. While the term "post-race" is often invoked to bolster arguments about the fading significance of race in the meaning of contemporary social life, other definitions bring

more complicated versions of the story of race and representation in America into focus. Squires, in *The Post-Racial Mystique: Media and Race in the Twenty-First Century* (2014), demonstrates how media discourses of post-racial America spin a vision of "an already achieved multicultural nation" (p. 6) built upon equal opportunity and access. Squires describes an aspirational media vision of post-racial America that addresses young people as individuals and consumers:

Generation Millennial—also known as Gen M, the most multiracial generation in American history—are described as free to interact with a smorgasbord of cultures, races, ethnicities, and religions without any further need for political activism. They can literally pick and choose how racial identity matters to them, as well as take their pick of colleges, workplaces, neighborhoods, and consumer goods in ways their forebears who fought for racial equality only dreamed. (pp. 14-15)

Squires argues that mainstream media—including news, reality television and racially-charged comedy shows—draws upon neo-liberal post-racial ideologies in which serious consideration of the historical contexts and structures that produce racism is replaced by blame for individuals who make poor choices. According to Squires (ibid), a post-racial media discourse "helps facilitate a sense of safe diversity, satisfying the need to bring color into the frame without conflict" (p. 7). On these terms, race becomes a personal attribute to be celebrated or derided on a level playing field of diversity and difference.

In recent times, a very different, critical story has begun to emerge in response to neo-liberal media discourses of post-race. For example, journalist and author Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015), in his article, "There is No Post-Racial America," attempts to demystify media discourses of post-racialism as "moving beyond" race by acknowledging the persistent effects of systemic racism in shaping the lives and opportunities of people of color. Coates argues that in the context of Obama-era media discussions of race, "the term 'post-racial' is almost never used in earnest" (para. 1). For Coates, making earnest use of the term post-racial in a national conversation about race would mean moving beyond mythologies of racial harmony and toward historic frameworks; for example, mainstream media might examine the complicated and charged relationship between the history of U.S. slavery and recent events involving the detainment and shooting of unarmed African Americans by police. A post-racial conversation, according to Coates, is a place to foreground complexity by "asking the right questions about racism" (para. 1).

Middle and high school students across the U.S. bring their questions about race and racism to school every day. Students' questions about race and their knowledge of current and historical events are shaped by personal experiences within their peer groups, families, and communities, and upon the kinds of post-racial media stories and representations in which discourses of individual choice hold considerable sway. As Patricia Hill Collins (2009) points out, in *Another Kind of Public Education: Race, Schools, the Media and Democratic Possibilities*,

Whether we like it or not, for youth, the media provides an education that often contradicts and supplants school-based learning. New technologies are the currency of youth, and critical education requires a media literacy that prepares youth to be critical consumers of media as well as cultural creators. (p. xi)

For teachers who are interested in the potential of media arts education as a means to help students unpack the oversimplifications of a post-racial media discourse, important questions include: What kinds of media resources are available to help art educators foreground the voices of students of color and LGBTQ students? How does youth driven media-making create space for exploring the conflicts and contradictions within students' experiences of race and racism?

This article explores these questions through an in-depth interview with a young author, 19-year-old Janaya Greene, about her experience of writing and co-directing *Veracity*, a short, educational film that explores issues of LGBTQ sexuality, race, homophobia, and belonging in a predominantly African American high school on Chicago's south side. The format of the article is informed by the methods of media arts-based researchers Ryoo, Lin and Grauer (2014), who use a visual essay to "explore the significance of a youth film production as a cultural form" (p. 128). Ryoo et. al., in their analysis of a short film made by a 17-year-old First Nations filmmaker, look closely at how the aesthetic possibilities of film enable the young filmmaker "to articulate the subtleties of human experience and work against stereotypes" (ibid). Research in visual culture and media arts education also places emphasis on the importance of aesthetic tools as a means for young people to address the issues that affect their lives with narrative and emotional complexity. For example, Brushwood Rose and Low (2014) suggest that media storytelling can be understood "not only as a source of empirical data, but as reflecting processes of creation and self-representation through which complex and contradictory meanings and experiences are revealed" (p. 30).

In this article, Greene reflects on her experience of writing, co-direct-

ing, and later screening and facilitating discussions about her short film for audiences of middle and high school students. Greene's film, *Veracity*, which can be viewed following a link at the end of the article, was produced by Scenarios USA, a national, non-profit organization "that uses writing and filmmaking to engage young people on issues of social justice, identity and health" (www.scenariosusa.org). Scenarios USA asks young people, "What matters to you?" and uses their responses to create a school-based curriculum and national writing competition that supports students in telling stories about the issues that affect their lives. While the stories are grounded in students' personal experiences, students also learn how to use fictional characters and scenarios to expand the possibilities for identification and create stories that other young people will be able to relate to.

In the fall of 2013, middle and high school students in three cities—Chicago, New York, and Cleveland—wrote stories and screenplays and created visual arts projects in response to Scenarios USA's curricular question, *What's the Real Deal About Power and Place?* With the support of their film studies teacher, Mr. Eugene Hazzard, Greene and her classmates submitted their work to Scenarios USA's national writing competition.¹ A selection committee of teachers, filmmakers and community stakeholders chose Greene's screenplay, *Veracity*, to be transformed into a short film.² According to Greene, "*Veracity* is about a girl named Olivia and her attraction to a new classmate at her school, Imani. Olivia is a cheerleader, and she is really outgoing. She could be the stereotypical popular girl, but she's not mean at all. She gets along with most people in her school. Imani had a girlfriend at her previous school and her mother didn't agree with it, so she was kicked out of her house. We just see Imani trying to stay low key and observe what is going on around her. She is not all that interested in making new friends or putting herself out there. *Veracity* explores the romantic interest between these two characters, and the pressures they face after they are outed."

1 Over 650 students from New York, Cleveland, and Chicago submitted writing and artwork to the national competition.

2 In New York City, the winning submission was high school junior Lani Pringle's screenplay for the short film, *Aleah*. This film explores themes of poverty, teen pregnancy, and domestic violence in teen relationships (<https://scenariosusa.org/shop/real-deal-films/aleah/>). In Cleveland, the winning submission was written by Skyler Edge, a high school sophomore. The film, *House Not Home*, focuses on the experiences of a gender fluid teenager who is navigating identity, bullying, and coming out (<https://scenariosusa.org/shop/bullying/house-not-home/>).

In the following interview, Greene talks about how media stereotypes shaped her experiences growing up, and how a film about same sex desire and friendship between two young Black women is provoking critical conversations amongst classroom audiences of middle and high school students. The interview is an example of what it can look like for a young person to resist post-racial media messages that treat identity as a preference or commodity for young people. Instead, Greene takes up an active position as critical storyteller and media-maker, taking seriously the multifaceted ways in which identity matters to youth of color and LGBTQ youth. The interviewer, Karyn Sandlos, a faculty member at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), worked in collaboration with Scenarios USA on the 2013 Real Deal Power and Place curriculum implementation in Chicago. Sandlos and Greene met during the filming of *Veracity* at Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy.

An Interview with Janaya Greene

Sandlos – *Veracity* looks at how two main characters, Olivia and Imani, experience same sex desire and homophobia in high school. Olivia and Imani are both African American. The student population at Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy, where *Veracity* was filmed, is roughly 80% African American, and 15% Hispanic. Also, Roseland, the neighborhood where the school is located on the South Side of Chicago, is predominantly African American. Why was it important to you to tell this story in this particular high school?



Figure 1. Still from *Veracity*. Olivia in the cafeteria.

Greene – High school is a growing period. When I went to Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy, I picked up on different ways people feel about same gender loving relationships. I'm from the South Side, from Brainerd Park, another African American neighborhood. I've grown up around Black people, so I felt like I wanted to say something about my community. A lot of the time when we talk about the rights of Black people, Black queer people are left out of the picture. Historically, that's just how it's been. Even today there are still people who say they are fighting for Black lives, but if it's not a straight Black life, it doesn't matter. I wanted to explore this in my film. Growing up, I heard a lot of people, my family members and friends, speak about the issues that affect Black people without being inclusive of Black people who are at different intersections.



Figure 2. Still from *Veracity*. Olivia and Imani meet in drama class.

Sandlos – How does *Veracity* try to challenge stereotypes about the experiences of LGBTQ young people in high school?

Greene – People think that you can look at somebody and know their sexual orientation. They will take what you wear and think that they can read you. Also, people will see masculine identified women and assume that they are lesbian, and they don't necessarily think that a feminine woman can be lesbian. That's something I wanted to challenge. That's why my character, Olivia, is a cheerleader. In high school, cheerleaders are looked up to. People don't often go after them. In *Veracity*, there is a scene where Olivia goes back to school the day after she and Imani are discovered together at James' party, and she finds a note in her locker with the word 'dyke' on it. She throws the note down on the floor and runs out of the school.

Sandlos – There is a lot at stake for Olivia, and also for Imani, who had to leave her previous school because of homophobia. How does *Veracity* try to capture the conflicts and contradictions these two characters are experiencing?

Greene – There is a scene in *Veracity* where Olivia goes looking for Imani, who is in the auditorium curating a set for drama class. It is the day after the party at James’s house. In this scene, Imani tries to minimize what happened between her and Olivia at the party, claiming that she was drunk, even though she wasn’t. Imani explains to Olivia how she ended up at Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy. Even though Imani rejects Olivia in this scene, at the same time this conversation helps Olivia, and the audience, understand where Imani is coming from. She just got out of one difficult situation and she’s not trying to hop into another one.

Sandlos – How does *Veracity* address the issue of young people providing support and resources to other LGBTQ youth?

Greene – Olivia is basically an outcast at school, eating her lunch in the bathroom by herself, and so on. In one scene, a girl named Sage approaches her in the bathroom and shares that she is bisexual. Sage gives Olivia a pamphlet for the Center on Halsted in Chicago,³ and encourages her to join a support group for LGBTQ youth. There, Olivia meets other LGBTQ youth and hears their coming out stories, including a popular football player who was outed at his school. Olivia is able to identify with his experience. It’s important that Olivia gets the information about the Center on Halsted from Sage, instead of from an adult or teacher. It helps Olivia understand that she’s not alone; other young people are struggling as well.

Sandlos – When you were writing the screenplay for *Veracity*, there was a national debate going on about same sex marriage. What was the conversation like at your school?

Greene – It was an active conversation. There was a debate in one of my English classes. I remember an African American girl and a Hispanic boy who was openly gay. They were so close, like best friends.

3 The Center on Halsted is “the Midwest’s most comprehensive community center dedicated to advancing community and securing the health and well-being of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) people of Chicagoland” (<http://www.centeronhalsted.org/cohooverview.html>)

And she was against same sex marriage. I just didn’t understand that.



Figure 3. Still from *Veracity*. Olivia in the restroom.

Sandlos – Did you feel like you were seeing a lot of contradictions in terms of how people thought about issues of sexuality and race, and how they tried to work out a position for themselves?

Greene – All the time. And it didn’t make any sense. The teaching that we get about Black history in high school and middle school is so brief, and so ‘cookie cutter,’ it doesn’t tell the whole story. I’m minor-ing in African American history in college, and I’m learning about Black LGBTQ civil rights leaders, like Bayard Rustin. He was so influential in Black history and civil rights, and in organizing the March on Washington, and he does not get credit because he was gay. Not all Black people are religious, but religion has played a big role in our history, and a lot of Black people use religion to defend their position that same sex marriage isn’t right.

Sandlos – How did your thinking about LGBTQ relationships change through the process of making *Veracity*?

Greene - After many debates among family, friends and classmates, I realized that the issue was not, “Is being gay right or wrong?” but rather, “How do humans, gay or straight, deserve to be treated?” It’s important to move beyond questions of right and wrong because everyone has an opinion. Naturally, people won’t always agree. But what I think most people would agree on is that everyone deserves happiness. People owe each other the right to happiness. I think if it’s looked at from that perspective more people will understand why it’s important to accept LGBTQ relationships.

Sandlos – But people sometimes feel conflicted about having different allegiances. For instance, a person might wonder, how can I be religious and also support same sex marriage? The characters in your film are also conflicted. They aren't sure how they feel. There is internal conflict between wanting to be open about their experience of same sex desire, and wanting to be accepted by their peers and families. How is this kind of conflict important to the story that you wanted to tell in *Veracity*?

Greene – In high school your social life is such a big deal, and Olivia definitely cares about her status. I think that she knows that most of her peers are against same sex relationships and so she is conflicted between wanting to follow her heart and her desires, and wanting to stay safe in her position. For Imani, it's about safety, and having a place to stay. Being kicked out of the house is a reality for a lot of LGBTQ kids in high school. Imani's conflict is between staying safe and staying out of the spotlight at this school, and also liking Olivia.

Sandlos – You tried out several different endings for *Veracity*. Can you talk about this part of the writing process?

Greene – In the first ending I wrote, Olivia committed suicide. I chose that ending because when I did the research for this project, I was really shocked at the numbers of LGBTQ people who consider suicide and who commit suicide. I wanted my audience to see that the things you say can have a big impact, and the way you treat people has a big impact. Words can be very powerful. I ended up changing the ending. I found a way for Olivia and Imani to be there for each other. I didn't want people to think that suicide is the only option. That's not the end of the story for a lot of LGBTQ people.

Sandlos – So, you had to think a lot about the message you wanted to send through your film, and how that message would be received by an audience of your peers.

Greene – I wasn't aware at first that a lot of films about LGBTQ young people focus on suicide or self-harm. When I realized this, I didn't want this to be the only story being told. You want there to be so many variations on what the ending could be like for everybody.

Sandlos – What do you think the impact of this open-endedness is on young people who are watching your film?



Figure 4. Still from *Veracity*. Imani in the cafeteria.

Greene – The novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie talks about the danger of the single story. I think that people use what they see in the media to formulate opinions and help them understand things that feel unfamiliar. When you get that one story, or that one stereotype, if you are not a part of that particular group you might think, “that's how it is, that's how those people are.” The ambiguity gives the audience a chance to come up with their own endings. All of them are possible. For people who don't identify as LGBTQ there is room to try to understand what Olivia and Imani are going through in a more active way.

Sandlos – What is it like for you to watch *Veracity* with an audience of your peers?



Figure 5. Still from *Veracity*. Olivia approaches her locker.

Greene – We did a premier in Chicago at Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy, and we did a smaller screening in a church with a mixed group of high school students who were Black, His-

panic, and White. It's still nerve-wracking for me to watch the film with other young people. The room gets super-silent when Olivia walks through the hallway toward her locker the day after the party and finds the note. When Olivia and Imani start making out at the party, some kids in the audience will make a big deal out of it. The hyper-sexualization of lesbians gets perpetuated in the way some young people react to this scene. But I think this is also an important scene to have in the film. Young people value other young people's experiences and perspectives. If they hear about something from someone who is on their level, they are going to be more open about it. They will feel like they can relate more. *Veracity* takes that approach from the beginning. The film is coming from a young person, so other young people feel like they can connect with that. Also, the film is short, so viewers feel like they move through a lot of emotions in a short span of time. For instance, young people find it hard to believe how quickly Olivia's peers flipped on her. They say, "I don't think it would have happened like that in my school," or "This happened to someone at my school." They start making these kinds of connections pretty quickly.

Sandlos – *Veracity* asks people to think about somebody's experience that might be different from their own. Why was this important to you?

Greene – I hope the film will help people understand that difference doesn't have to be bad. At the time when I was making *Veracity* I identified as bisexual, but I was not at all in a position to talk about it. I was thinking of ways I could hide my bisexuality from my family and peers. I didn't want to deal with it. Watching the film with other people was even more nerve-wracking because I felt like I was 'telling on myself.' I was asking myself, "How can you justify being straight and speaking on LGBTQ situations?" *Veracity* influenced me because I realized there was no point in fighting with myself.

Sandlos – When *Veracity* premiered in at the Columbus Drive Auditorium at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), there was a discussion about representations of same sex desire in TV and film. An audience member asked the question, "isn't it trendy now, to see women kissing and getting together with other women on TV?" How do you react to this question?



Figure 6. Still from *Veracity*. Olivia and Imani at the party.

Greene – Lesbians are hyper-sexualized in the media. Lesbian relationships aren't seen as serious relationships. The mainstream media and TV are feeding that image to us, and it is very simplistic. *Veracity* doesn't try to generalize about Black lesbian women's experience, or about Black people, for that matter. This is a very specific story, set in a specific time and place. When I was growing up, I heard about racism, but I did not know that the reason I was living in certain circumstances was because I was Black, or because I had Black parents. I didn't understand that when the media talks about these 'bad' neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago, it's because of race. I knew that Chicago was the most segregated city in the United States, but I didn't understand why until I got to college.

I wanted my story to focus on Black lesbian characters because representation has always been a big deal for me. Growing up, I used to love *Teen Vogue*, but it shot my self-confidence because there just were no little Black girls in there. More recently, *Teen Vogue* has been doing much better, and I'm so happy about that. But when I was younger that magazine didn't serve me. A lot of things didn't serve me. So when I wrote the screenplay for *Veracity*, it was really important to me to represent Black people, and especially Black women. When we talk about representation, and when we talk about Black people, it's always Black men. Black women get silenced. In the media coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement, women like Sandra Bland do not get the kind of attention that they deserve. "Black people" is equated with Black men. Black women deserve to get their story told as well. If Black women watch something about women, it's mostly White women, and so we have to watch that and then we have to find something about Black people, and try to bring them together. We shouldn't have to go off and find different kinds of representations in order to piece together who we are.

Toward a Post-Racial Media Arts Education

Greene's reflections on her film, *Veracity*, is a resource for contemporary media arts educators wishing to use media to craft a critical approach to a post-racial classroom conversation. Research in art education has demonstrated the value of media literacy and the arts in helping students critically engage with (as opposed to passively consuming) the films, television shows, news and other forms of mass media that permeate their lives (Wyrick, 1994; Duncum, 2001). The media arts classroom is an important place to explore students' ideas about the conflicts and contradictions within representation in post-racial America, not least of all because mainstream media stories about race and racism subject young people to simplified, often stereotypical narratives about themselves. For example, in the context of recent media attention to police shootings of young African American males, the stereotypical discourse of masculinity and race positions the victims of these shootings as inherently threatening and dangerous.⁴

Contrary to the post-racial media illusion of identity as a superficial attribute, in reality, young people of color do not simply "pick and choose how racial identity matters to them" (Squires, 2014, p. 14-15). As Greene highlights in the interview, in the absence of realistic, humanizing images of young Black lives in the mainstream media, young people of color are left to "piece together" a cohesive sense of themselves from images that speak to some part of their identity. Ngo (2010) explains how identity works as "a double movement" (p. 12) in which young people learn to refashion the narrative constraints that have come to define them:

Identity involves a double action, where in one movement we are *put in* subject positions by others who draw on available, powerful discourses to identify us; and in another movement, we *take up* subject positions by drawing on available discourses ourselves. In other words, identity can be constituted in two ways. (p. 11)

Community-based approaches to media education are making space for young people of color to challenge mainstream media representations and tell their own stories, often for an audience

4 In his recent grand jury testimony, Officer Darren Wilson describes the unarmed shooting victim Michael Brown as "demon-like," resembling "Hulk Hogan" (Cave, 2014, para. 1). Wilson's description suggests how his perceptions of 18-year-old Brown are shaped by dominant discourses of masculinity and race, which ascribe monstrous, inhuman qualities to Brown.

of their peers.⁵ Youth-driven narratives may not resolve in happy endings or offer simple solutions to the complex problems young people face today; however, they do speak to other young people with a sense of inclusion and authenticity that comes from shared experiences of marginalization. Hill Collins (2009), in her analysis of the educative potential of media in the lives of youth, calls attention to "the cultural domain of power, the site where ideas are created and resisted, as a vitally important place for African American youth and their allies to practice resistance" (p. 169). In the process of writing stories about the experiences and social contexts that young people are living in themselves—including the experiences they bear witness to via friends or through media—young people are creating humanizing narratives and images that work to complicate the oversimplifications and stereotypes of post-race.

Greene's reflections on the process of writing the screenplay for *Veracity* offer important insights and discussion points for art teachers and educators interested in engaging students in a post-racial conversation that takes into account the specificities of how race "pivots on questions of gender and sexuality" (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 167). In the interview, the point of view is that of a young African American woman who is grappling with shifts in her understanding of what race means when she begins to question her sexual orientation and realize that she identifies as bisexual. Using the Scenarios USA Real Deal curriculum as a resource, Greene translates her personal struggle into a fictional story about how young people navigate their sexuality at the intersections of gender, race, family, community, and religion. It is unusual to see an educational film about LGBTQ experiences and struggles that features main characters of color, especially young women. A contemporary curricular resource that brings the experiences of young people of color into focus, *Veracity* also addresses a gap in the field of representation of mainstream media images of LGBTQ lives.

Scenarios USA works to do justice to the complex ways adolescents live their identities by privileging the voices and perspectives of marginalized youth. The focus of the Real Deal curriculum on the theme of Power and Place makes space for a rich specificity in terms of the ways young people talk about their lives. In *Veracity*, the focus

5 This approach to reworking dominant discourses about race is central to the work of community-based initiatives such as The Black Youth Project, a Chicago based, youth-driven website that puts a critical spin on media stories about contemporary issues in politics, culture and race. The BYP website functions as a media hub to "expand the human and social capital of young African Americans, facilitating their general empowerment through highlighting their voices and experiences" (<http://blackyouthproject.com/about-us/history/>)

on the personal context(s) of family, religion, and peer relationships that shape the experiences of two young African American female characters enables Greene to create a scenario that other middle and high school students can relate to. While not all students will identify directly with the experience of coming out in high school, many find that they are able to identify with the characters' worries about finding and/or losing their place within the social hierarchy of their school. As Greene points out, in post-screening discussions of *Veracity*, students are quick to comment on an aspect of the film that makes them uncomfortable; namely, how abruptly Olivia's peers turned against her. They say, "I don't think it would have happened like that in my school," or "This happened to someone at my school."

The students' comments suggest that while they are able to relate to Olivia's situation in terms of what feels familiar, they are also thinking within their local contexts about how things might turn out differently. And while *Veracity* situates the characters' experiences in a specific school, neighborhood, and community, the film also engages viewers in thinking about how larger, systemic structures of racism and homophobia shape the characters' experiences; for example, Greene found inspiration for her screenplay in conversations amongst her peers at Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy about the debate on same sex marriage taking place in the media on a national level. Rather than asking students to take a position on same sex relationships, Greene's reflections on *Veracity* suggest what it can look like to think through one's conflicts and contradictions, and develop a nuanced capacity for understanding experiences that are different from our own.

As Greene listened to conversations about same sex relationships among family, friends, and classmates, she was perplexed by contradictions between the personal and the political that they were bringing into focus. In a debate about same sex marriage in her English class, Greene grapples with understanding how an African American female student can object to same sex marriage when her best friend is openly gay. Through the process of writing the screenplay for *Veracity*, Greene begins to realize her own tendency to see the issues in terms of right and wrong. This realization enabled Greene to move beyond trying to resolve contradiction and conflict in order to ask, "How do humans, gay or straight, deserve to be treated?" (scenariosusa.org/shot/bullying/veracity)

This shift in focus is an important prompt for teachers to think about how a post-racial classroom conversation can invite students to wrestle with differences within identity and community, and think deeply about their responsibilities to one another. *Veracity* is an example of how, as Gilbert (2014) points out, "new narrative forms enfranchise new relational modes" (p. xxi). By treating instances of

personal contradiction and conflict as sources of data, students can use this material to draw their own post-racial connections between histories of discrimination and oppression, and current events and media representations. We see this process at work in the interview with Greene, who is able to relate the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at work in the political slogan Black Lives Matter⁶ to her personal experience of coming out as a young, bisexual woman of color. Another example of a post-racial analysis emerges through Greene's insights into how her film complicates and humanizes a story of Black women and same sex desire.

Conclusion

While the media arts classroom is a rich place for students to work through the contradictions and conflicts of a post-race conversation, the outcomes of this conversation cannot be predicted in advance. We see this unpredictability at work in *Veracity*, an educational film that raises questions about how young people experience race at the intersections of sexuality, gender, and representation. While the film focuses on the characters' efforts to redefine their place in their school and community, the ending leaves audiences wondering how, exactly, will this scenario turn out? Will Olivia and Imani remain friends? Will they be accepted at school? In *Veracity*, according to Greene, "the ambiguity gives the audience a chance to come up with their own endings" (personal communication, January 26, 2016).

A post-racial conversation about contemporary media invites students and their teachers to move beyond the passive position of consuming media stereotypes as entertainment and toward thinking about media as a place where stereotypes are both enacted and called into question. Watching and responding to youth-driven media stories such as *Veracity* is an opportunity for students to "rework discourses that have already identified them" (Ngo, 2010, p. 12). Calling media stereotypes into question is dangerous, however, because as Adichie (2009) suggests, it opens up space to consider multiple versions of the story. This space of multiplicity is produced through the encounter between "the deeply contradictory and multilayered voices and themes in popular culture" (Rose, 1994, p. xii) and the normative

⁶ Jelani Cobb (2016), in "The Matter of Black Lives," writes that the Black Lives Matter movement began in summer 2013 as a response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. The words, "Black Lives Matter," function symbolically, according to Cobb, "as a distillation not only of the anger that attended Zimmerman's acquittal but also of the animating principle at the core of Black social movements dating back more than a century" (p. 35).

assumptions and biases we bring to the work of interpreting media representations. Greene addresses this multiplicity when she reflects on the potential for her film to call attention to the media stereotypes that affect young African American women and LGBTQ people “through a very specific story, set in a specific time and place” (personal communication, January 26, 2016). As an educational film and a media artwork, *Veracity* uses this specificity to navigate and rework the personal, local, and systemic issues of power and representation that operate in the lives of young people in post-racial America today.

To access *Veracity* for private viewing, visit:

Veracity
<https://vimeo.com/127121431>
Password = VERpri2

Veracity BTS
<https://vimeo.com/127408770>
Password = VERbt2

For information about Scenarios USA’s Real Deal curriculum, visit <http://www.scenariosusa.org>

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