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MY TURN

■ **Dmae Roberts**



Seriously, trust me

In a lot of television dramas lately, I've heard the words "seriously, trust me" repeated by actors a couple times in each episode. It's as if Hollywood writers are showing their insecurity or paranoia about how little trust they engender. Sometimes I hear myself saying "seriously?" — a word meant as a statement disguised as a question. "Seriously?" has replaced "really?" or "are you kidding me?" It can also take the place of the more-'90s-affirmation, "totally!"

I can live with "seriously," but when I hear actors using the phrase "trust me," it takes me to a place full of doubt, resentment, and distrust. It doesn't help that many of the characters who use it are involved in conspiracy plots, criminal activity, or intercultural political strife. The use of "trust me" crosses all television genres — from contemporary to science fiction and fantasy.

Perhaps it's because I grew up with so much mistrust — the Watergate break-in; Nixon's criminal activity; the Vietnam War and the Fall of Saigon; the Reagan years with the threat of nuclear annihilation in the '80s; Clinton, oh yes, Clinton, who never inhaled and didn't know that woman in the '90s. Of course, there are also the post-millennial events of 9/11 as well as the continual Persian Gulf wars and involvement in Afghanistan. Public trust has never been lower. All the "isms" that I thought might be eliminated in my lifetime are still going strong — racism, sexism, and ageism — along with homophobia, bullying, demonizing the poor and lower classes, etc. The list doesn't end.

So when a television character, usually a white male, tells someone, "trust me," my inside voice immediately responds with "Hell no!" Seriously.

It isn't just the world that has provoked a lack of trust in me. As a 1.5 generation immigrant, I had a less-than-secure upbringing — moving every year to another new "home" while my parents battled each other about their lack of money so loud that the neighbors could hear the shouting.

It took me many years to learn that most of what people say doesn't represent their true thoughts and that actions speak louder than words. But even today, my nature is to be a little gullible and I accept people at face value, though this often leads to disappointment.

I learned rather early that who I am and what I've lived appears foreign or odd to many in the

mainstream, which made it nearly impossible to talk about myself or what I really thought. I've never been good with chit-chat and often felt undercover. For that very reason, I started calling myself "Secret Asian Woman."

As a biracial, but not visibly Asian American, revealing myself meant "blowing my cover," which inevitably escalated to a series of interrogative questions about my past and my identity — another experience adding to my distrust.

Yet I still have a need to communicate my thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a way that feels safe. That's why I began writing from a personal perspective. If I created personal radio pieces, autobiographical stage plays, or memoir essays, I didn't have to worry about people's instant responses to me as a person. If they did react, it was to my work and what I'd created.

When I meet people who want to comment on my work, it surprises them that I really don't want to talk about my personal life. It seems to be a stumbling block to many. In talkback sessions about my plays, films, or radio pieces, or e-mails regarding my essays, people ask very personal questions.

Sometimes I will answer, to a degree. There is an invisible line that allows one to talk about personal experiences as an artistic creation. But when someone crosses that line out of curiosity to delve further into my psyche, that's when I abruptly stop. I believe there's a secret regarding most actors who perform their own stories or writers who write a memoir — They don't like to talk about their personal lives; that's why they chose to express it as a work of art.

It all comes down to trust. People aren't just responding to the artistry of your work; they are commenting on your life and experiences. Some betray that trust, even unintentionally, when they want to know more than you're willing to share. So when I hear an actor portraying a character that speaks those words — "trust me" — I immediately feel it's an effort to manipulate rather than share true honesty.

Perhaps we should replace "trust me" as a command, to something like, "I want to be someone you can trust." Or change it to a simple request: "Please believe me." Now that is a scene I'd like to see on television or on the stage. Seriously.

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Wondering what events are going on this week?

Check out *The Asian Reporter's* Community & A.C.E. Calendar sections, on pages 10 and 12.