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Henson, Donna F.

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## **Live and Let Lie: An Autoethnography of Daily Deception**

Donna F. Henson

Bond University

### **Author Note**

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Donna Henson, Faculty of Society & Design, Bond University, Gold Coast, Queensland 4229, Australia.

Email: [dhenson@bond.edu.au](mailto:dhenson@bond.edu.au). Ph: +61 7 5595 2530.

Bio: Donna F. Henson (Ph.D., Arizona State University) is an Associate Professor of Communication in the Faculty of Society & Design at Bond University. Her research interests currently center on meaning-making post-trauma, rumination and narrative, performative writing and autoethnography.

**Abstract**

This autoethnographic essay gives voice to the silent screams and layering of smiles and selves on souls that make-up and mask our everyday experience. Playing in the spaces between and among the lyrical and liminal, creative and critical, I reflect on the little fictions of omission and commission that compose our daily deception.

*Keywords:* autoethnography, performative writing, poetic inquiry, writing as a method of inquiry.

### **Live and Let Lie: An Autoethnography of Daily Deception**

Her reminiscing bumps up and grinds against past stories, past lives, and multiplicities that play pretend. It's the lingering accounts that layer on, and layer up, that shape you-make you-mask you. That hide you in plain sight. So many masks of our own making. This layering of selves on soul. The make-up, make pretend, masquerade of visions and versions of someone I used to know—someone I used to be. She's lost in the layers of competence and coherence and convention. Some fractured rendering of "plot and circumstance," words on a page, lines on a face.

She wonders if maybe she's left it too late to plot the story of her life. Too late, to try on other masks and maybes. Peering in the windows of other lives and possibilities deferred, denied. Her "midnight library" of could-be, should-be, maybes (Haig, 2020).

Don't.

She smears this window on another world, as she smears her lipstick. Smudging and subduing these fictions of self. "Straying maps the path," she tells herself, and though she suspects that's not what Rumi (1207/1273; in Housden, 2001, p. 101) meant, it's the little lies that you keep you sane.

That keep you safe.

### **Smile love, it might not be that bad...**

Don't tell me to smile. She is tired of smiling. Smiling is exhausting—the symptom that is, and the cause. She knows it's something about the patriarchy and misogyny, but all of that feels too much and too hard today. She'll smash that tomorrow.

She wonders where they find their energy. Their confidence? Their delusions? The willful arrogance and ignorance? They don't know and they don't care. She cares, too much and not enough. She sighs and moves on, masks up. It's either that or scream—and screams, it seems, are frowned upon. She indulges for a moment in the imagining. A world of women, who put down their pens, put down their children, put down their put-up and shut-up and shrug-off and mask off and scream. Scream like their worlds are ending, like their bodies are their own, like their voices might have consequences.

A scream “is a wish your heart makes...” (David, Hoffman, & Livingston, 1950).

Smiling might be easier.

### **Smile love, it might never happen...**

Sometimes she feels lost in the layers. Self on soul on self on smile on could-be, should-be, maybe, prophecy. Mask up, keep on, and carry on. She carries on, faking-this, making-that. Somehow, it seems, both under- and over-estimated. Live and let lie, she thinks, and she keeps the screams to herself.

She's afraid to pull that thread, imagining an endless unravelling. That's how it feels sometimes, late at night or early in the morning. In the witching hours. She's come undone. This new anxiety takes physical form, stealing breath from her bones and spiraling ill-defined fear in new-knit agonies of unknowing. Her reason choked by stifled screaming. Pull this thread, and that becomes the story. She thinks she'll pull another.

It seems sometimes she hardly knows herself. The layers of masks and memories shifting, clouding, hiding or creating the stranger in the mirror. She comes back to the trivial.

The surface vanities that obscure more meaningful realities. Words on a page. Lines on her face. The little lies to live by.

She imagines the little lies, layered on little fictions of addition and omission. Tell this. Hide that. Nod. Laugh. Smile. The everyday armor of daily deception. Days and decades of lacquered fictions, of well-practiced pretend. *Yes, “you are wise to fear me now...”* (Adcock, 2000). Humor him. Ignore that. Make up and make believe in rituals of protection and defense. Freeze frame and freeze face. *I’m ready for my close-up now, darling.*

She was born ready.

She laughs to herself. She’s been told she’d be an awful poker player. But they somehow don’t know she plays every day. Gambling her world on some fiction of self. She’ll see you and she’ll raise you. Double down and double up. The routine strategies of survival—there’s no calling this bluff.

She wonders if maybe this will change. If some diminishing return on years invested will mutate lines of age to those of rage. If she’ll stop playing by the rules of this game of truth and dare that we call life. If she’ll care less for consequences and give up counting cards. If the arriving and inevitable age of invisibility will leave her, cards on the table, all in or tapping out. Stuck forever in some fiction, destined and defined by a single thread. *I am woman, hear me raw.*

She thinks she’s still in the game.

**Smile love. You’re prettier when you smile...**

Where does it begin? The natural made unnatural. Social pathologies of body and behavior. Her hair, her skin, her nails. Politeness and privilege. Fake it 'til you make it: the cultural camouflage of beauty and betrayal. Deception or decoration? The Good Girls Don't and costuming of roles and rituals. Sometimes she's thankful she doesn't have a daughter, thinking mothering must mean a destiny of observing the failures and frailties of those you love in a world where it's inevitable. Knowing no-one can live up to the hope of being in a world that mandates seeming.

She gets stuck for a moment. Hung up on the word mandate. Mandate. Stuck in a moment. Men and time. Time and meaning and not all men and smiling and screaming. The masks we wear.

She feels shallow in the seeming (Buber, 2011). Stuck in the tension between revelation and concealment, sketching the lines of authenticity and duplicity, trying and failing. Her rumination both devastating and disappointing, too hard, too much—not enough. Her feminism guilty and inadequate, knowing awareness without action equals anxiety. Or something.

Where does it end?

She's second-guessing the consequences of these confessions, despite knowing every word on the page is itself a little fiction, a decision of commission or omission. *I'll tell you mine, if you tell me yours*, she says.

She thinks again of the little lies. The daily deceptions, considering the questions of all communication. The co-construction of meaning. Knowing, like all communication, deception is a joint action (Stewart, Zediker, & Witteborn, 2012). A social affair: we lie together. The karma chameleons of convenient truth, little white lies painted in shades of

grey. Our social contracts of suppression, silence, and smiling, made manifest in masks of our own—our mutual—making. In acts of collusion and consequence, vulnerability and gullibility, I'll bring my borderline betrayals to this masquerade if you'll bring your truth bias (O'Hair & Cody, 1994).

How are you? They ask.

I'm fine.

She imagines the unlayering. The peeling off of layers and faces, big secrets and little fictions. Lowering the weaponry of civility, peeling down to the soul, a walking-talking paradox of truth and bone. She thinks it may be less about lies and all about honesty and authenticity but knows it's not that simple. She wonders if Choskhi (2018) is right, if it is "better, perhaps, to be thought of as a fiction than to be discarded from memory completely."

She doesn't know.

She's tired, her threads a-frayed. She thinks she'll let it lie.



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