

## Ep #365: The Mask



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**Rachel Hart**

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You are listening to the Take a Break Podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 365.

Hey everybody. We are back again talking about The Drink Archetypes, which I introduced on the podcast last month. So, the archetypes are eight unconscious patterns that influence why you drink and why you reach for another. And today we're going to do a deep dive into one of the archetypes called The Mask.

Now, understanding this archetype is so important if you find yourself reaching for a drink to feel more at ease in social situations. Now, just as a quick reminder, in Episode 360, I talked about a different archetype called The Connector. And that archetype is all about your brain associating a drink with creating an emotional bond.

And The Connector and The Mask often appear together. Now many people have them as their primary and their secondary archetypes, but they're really not the same thing. So, The Mask is less about creating connection and more about dealing with social anxiety. And that's what we're going to be talking about today.

Now I will say this, if drinking, for you, is a shared activity with friends and family or significant other, I encourage you to listen to this episode, listen to the episode on The Connector, and see which one resonates more with you. You can, of course, also go take the free Drink Archetypes quiz and get your full report by heading over to [FindYourDrinkType.com](https://FindYourDrinkType.com).

When you do that, your results are going to show what your top two archetypes are. That said, remember also that understanding and knowing which archetypes apply to you and they can change. They can change over the course of your life. They can change in different situations, but having this information is so important because it really helps you identify the unconscious patterns behind your drinking, and it's those unconscious patterns that really can trip you up when you're either trying to drink less or trying to stop.

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Truly, and I am like a broken record about this, but it does not matter how motivated you are to change or how many good reasons you have to want to cut back or stop drinking. It's going to be really hard to resist temptation and you're probably going to be very frustrated that your attempts to change are hit or miss unless you really start to understand what's happening beneath the surface of the habit and know how to address it.

And that's where The Drink Archetypes come in. You can kind of think about it like this. Yes, you like to drink. Yes, you like the taste. I'm not trying to tell you that those things aren't true. What I want you to get curious about, what I want you to see, is that over time, your brain also learned that the drink represents something more than just a reward for the lower brain.

It came to symbolize something. That's what these Drink Archetypes are about.

Your goal is really to understand what the drink represents so that you can teach your brain a new way to get the deeper reward that it's after. That's how you create lasting change.

All right, let's talk about The Mask. When The Mask archetype is activated, the brain associates alcohol, with confidence when you're around other people. So maybe the buzz that you get, it kind of quiets the anxiety you feel in certain social situations. Maybe alcohol helps you stop feeling so insecure. Maybe it just helps you enjoy meeting new people instead of finding situations like that, the seventh level of hell. The Mask shows up for people in new social settings, especially when you're meeting people for the first time.

And there's pressure to make a good impression, but, and this is really important, The Mask archetype can keep showing up even when you're familiar with the situation or the people that you're seeing. And that's one of the tricky things about social anxiety. A lot of times we assume it only shows up in new settings with new people, but that's not always the case.

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If you listen to this podcast, you hear me talk a lot about how I started drinking in college. And of course, The Mask archetype commonly appears when people are navigating social dynamics of high school or college or graduate school and then suddenly you add alcohol into the mix. But I want to add that a lot of people struggle with The Mask archetype and feeling anxious in social situations well beyond their teens and twenties.

I work with so many people, I have seen this over and over again, where people would be like "Rachel, this is crazy. I'm in my 50s. I'm in my 60s. Why am I still feeling anxious in social situations? Why haven't I grown out of this by now?" But I think that's one of the big misconceptions, right? You don't necessarily grow out of social anxiety.

You have to really do the work to teach yourself new tools, how to handle it. And you certainly don't grow out of it when part of what you have developed is a habit of reaching for a drink to deal with your unease. The Mask can show up in lots of different kind of times and situations in your life, maybe when you're starting a new job and you're trying to build relationships with colleagues.

The Mask is also a common archetype that appears when your work or your personal life. Requires frequent networking or social events or parties. The Mask can show up when you're dating, especially if you're reentering the dating pool after a long time away. And it tends to also show up when you struggle with insecurities and those insecurities that you feel are heightened when you're around other people.

You could be struggling with your appearance. You might not feel like you're as accomplished or smart or funny as the people around you. But if you are feeling insecure and that tends to get elevated when you are around other people, you can guarantee that The Mask may be showing up. Basically, what all of these kind of different situations have in common is I'm feeling anxious around other people and then I'm reaching for a drink to help me deal with that anxiety.

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And of course it's really normal to do that, right? Because I think all of us are like, "I don't want to be stuck in my head when I'm socializing. I just want to have a good time." And so this is also why at first it can be tricky to deal with this archetype because when you start using alcohol to deal with feeling uneasy, At first you're like, "This is a great strategy. It works." This is what I thought. I was like, "This is fantastic. Like, why didn't no one ever tell me that alcohol could do this?" I totally thought that I had found this amazing strategy to deal with social anxiety. I would start drinking and I would kind be like waiting for the buzz to kick in.

Because then I finally knew like, "Oh, okay, finally. Like finally, I get to have fun. Finally, I get a break from all that incessant nattering going on inside my head." I really wanted to be able to have fun and stop feeling awkward and stop worrying about how I looked or what to say or where to stand or not having anyone to talk to.

And for me, knowing that, well, I could have a drink or two and then this will all go away. I mean, it felt like magic. But what I didn't realize was that The Mask actually was making it hard for me to rein in my drinking.

Because here's the thing, and all of you out there dealing with social anxiety, you know this, social anxiety has a way of showing up early to the party. It often appears well before you even get where you're going. So what happens, and I will tell you what happened in my case, is I would start drinking before I left, just to take the edge off.

In college, I would call this pre-gaming. I'm just drinking with my friends while we're all getting ready. And I'm sure back then I was like, "Why wait to get drunk when we can just start drinking now?" But deep down, my anxiety would start well before I headed out to a party. Drinking ahead of time was this coping mechanism for me.

But the other piece is that I kept pre-gaming, even though I didn't call it that, but I kept doing that long after college. I remember you know, living in New York for a long time and sometimes I, when I was gonna meet up with

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people, sometimes I would show up early to the bar because I wanted to be able to get a drink before other people showed up.

Or sometimes I would have the opposite strategy. Maybe I'd be like, "Well, maybe I'll be late and I'll stop off at another bar on my way there and have a drink and then head over." So one of the big problems with The Mask is that you're in a rush to get rid of your anxiety and you start feeling anxious before the event even starts for many people.

And so because of that, that's one of the reasons why it can be hard to really rein in your drinking because you're like, "Okay, well, here I am feeling anxious now and I haven't even gotten there. So, why don't I just pour a glass of wine before I head out?" Now, the other problem with The Mask is that you tend to drink very quickly because remember, you're in a rush to get rid of your anxiety.

Slowly savoring a drink, that's all well and good, but if you do that, it's going to take longer for your anxiety to dissipate. So I would get where I was going and I would make a beeline for the bar. You rush for that first drink because you're feeling anxious. You don't want to feel anxious.

You want to stop feeling this. So The Mask archetype really can lead to drinking more and drinking a lot faster simply because you're in a rush to stop feeling anxious.

And there's another thing, you might find yourself falling into a trap when it comes to this archetype. When you teach your brain, okay, so I drink so that I can feel at ease, then the idea of not drinking in certain situations is just totally unappealing. For me, this sounded a lot like, "If I'm not going to drink, why would I even bother going?"

I really often had that thought. "If I'm not going to drink. Why would I even go?"

Yes, alcohol and fun were tied together in my brain, but a big piece of what was blocking my fun was the fact that my anxiety and my insecurities would

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bubble up in social situations and it would get in the way of me having a good time. Now, just to add, this is where Dry January can really backfire for people if you have The Mask or The Connector archetypes, because a lot of times what you will unconsciously do, you will just hide out for a month.

I see this happening all the time. I remember doing this myself. It's like, "Okay, fine. I'm not going to drink for 30 days. I'll be a hermit." And yes, if you're not going to put yourself in situations where your anxiety normally bubbles up and where you normally use a drink to deal with that anxiety, then yeah, if you happen to have The Mask or The Connector archetype, saying no is probably going to be a lot easier just by the sheer fact that you're not putting yourself in those situations.

But what happens when Dry January is over? Well, if you're anything like me, you go right back to the habit. You pick up right where you left off. And honestly, success based on being a hermit is not what anyone wants. It's not what I wanted. It's not what anyone wants. And there was a point in my life where I would think to myself, "It would just be so much easier if I just didn't have to deal with people. If I just lived on my own, in a really rural area, like that would be so much easier for me." But the truth is I didn't actually want that. I wanted to feel connected to others.

I wanted to have fun with people. I wanted to be social, but I really struggled with like, "Oh God, I have all this stupid social anxiety and, you know, if I'm not drinking, I don't know how to handle it." What I would do, I would often force myself to go out. But if I wasn't drinking in these situations, I was out there. Yes, I was like, at the party, I was socializing, but I was hanging back, so I was checking my phone, or I was camping out by, where the food was and eating more, or I was stepping outside to have a smoke, or I was making an excuse to leave early. Like, going in that situation also wasn't fun for me.

And so I felt really, really stuck. And I truly believed that the solution was I just have to figure out how to drink the perfect amount. Not too little that it

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doesn't do enough to deal with my anxiety, but not too much that I start acting stupid. Just enough, you know, so I could take away the anxiety and have fun, but not so much that I wake up the next day feeling embarrassed.

The more you rely on a drink to get rid of anxiety in social situations so that you can have a good time, the more your anxiety grows. Rather than unlocking fun, drinking is actually fueling your unease. Now, I will tell you this, this idea that drinking was actually fueling my unease was a really hard thing for me to wrap my head around at first because I definitely was like, "No, that is not true. It helps. Drinking helps me feel less anxious. It helps me have more fun when I'm out. But here's the thing, the more I needed that drink as soon as I got to the party, or let's be honest, before I even got there, the less capable I felt at handling my anxiety on my own. I didn't believe that I could really navigate feeling anxious without a drink.

I believed that I could go and I could not drink and I could not have a very good time. But those choices, I mean, it felt terrible to feel like, all right, "So my choices are go and don't have a good time, or just don't go at all, or go and drink too much." I really felt stuck, but I was stuck because of this lack of belief in my own ability to handle anxiety on my own.

And what that meant was that I had anxiety about my anxiety. That's how drinking was fueling my unease. And this is what happens with The Mask archetype. The less capable you feel about handling your anxiety on your own, the more your anxiety grows.

When it comes to The Mask archetype, change is not about being some sort of Goldilocks and figuring out, okay, how do I land on that perfect sweet spot. But it's also not about swearing off alcohol for the rest of your life. It really has nothing to do with either of those things. Change is about really shifting your perception of what it means to feel confident around other people.

This is a big thing because we're taught to believe that anxiety and confidence can't really coexist. You either feel one or the other. When we

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have that belief that they can't coexist, we are in this place where it's like, "Okay, well, if I feel social anxiety, then I have to conquer all of it. I have to get rid of all that anxiety before I can finally feel confident."

Which is a pretty daunting place to be in. And I think that's why so many people are like, "All right, well, that's never going to happen. I'm never going to conquer all of it. And I don't like the prospect of being a hermit forever. So, I mean, I guess I'm just going to keep drinking." But with The Mask archetype, alcohol really can start to feel like a crutch. At least it did for me because deep down, I just wanted to feel confident on my own. I didn't want to need a drink to feel at ease socially.

When you have The Mask archetype, I will tell you this, I know how frustrating it can be, but change is totally possible. It's just not going to look the way you might expect because success does not mean that you like magically erase all your insecurities and hang-ups and social anxiety, and you never feel anxious again in your life.

Success is about reframing confidence. Confidence isn't the absence of social anxiety; it's knowing exactly what to do when you feel anxious. It's about having tools at your disposal to navigate your anxiety on your own without a drink. That is true confidence. The knowledge that when you get that feeling in the pit of your stomach or your hands start getting sweaty or you're like sitting there and all your insecurities are bubbling up, you know exactly what to do.

Now, I know that there are some of you out there who are listening to me say this and you're like, "That's not going to work for me. I'm too anxious." And I will tell you, if you're thinking that right now, I will just say, I really feel you. I really understand because I used to have so much anxiety. I felt so nervous.

I remember feeling so nervous. Sometimes, it was like I was going to be sick. I was so caught up in my head. I was so fixated on like how I looked and feeling so ill at ease in my body and be standing there thinking, "I have

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nothing to say and what am I supposed to do with my body and everyone here has it together and I'm a mess."

I felt so anxious for so long that I was sure the anxiety I felt was just, who I was. I'm just a really anxious person. It's part of my DNA, but that truly wasn't the case. The problem was that no one ever talked to me about anxiety. No one ever showed me what to do. No one ever explained what created it.

Nobody ever really gave me tools for how to handle those moments when I felt like I just wanted to run and get away from where I was.

And so, I tried to muddle my way through. And at some point my brain was like, "Aha, we found the solution. Let's drink problem solved." But of course the problem was not solved. Now the superpower of The Mask, because each of the eight archetypes have their own superpowers. The superpower is: it's really stepping into the self-confidence that you deeply crave, which means discovering the connection between your inner critic and your drinking.

Because for The Mask archetype, these two things are most definitely connected. It's the inner critic that says, "I'm the only one feeling weird at this party. Everyone here is so much prettier, smarter, more accomplished than me. All these people have it together. I am a mess." That inner critic that just keeps chattering and chattering and chattering.

As long as it's there, the more anxious you will feel and the more likely you're going to reach for a drink. The problem again, that the comfort you get from the drink is short lived. Tomorrow that inner critic is going to pop right back up reminding you of everything that's wrong with you. Oh, and by the way, you also drank too much last night.

Working with The Mask, it really forces you to do work with your own inner critic. It forces you to really stop putting off feeling good about who you are until you fix your drinking and decide, you know what? I got to work with

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this inner critic now because an unchecked inner critic, it's always going to lead to drinking more.

When you stop using a drink to quiet your anxiety in social situations, what you actually end up doing is you stop putting up barriers on the journey to your self-confidence. The goal here with this archetype, it's really about discovering how to feel comfortable in your skin and comfortable when anxiety appears, because there's no magic pill that's going to erase all anxiety from your life, but there are so many tools and techniques that you can use to feel like, "You know what, okay, I'm feeling anxious, but I got this. I know what to do." The goal is to stop comparing yourself with others and despairing that you don't measure up. The goal is to appreciate yourself without a bunch of conditions or caveats. And the goal is to feel good about yourself when you are with other people. And when you do this, these are not just nice to have things.

When you do this, it is so much easier to feel in control of your desire to drink. In fact, the desire to drink is going to be a lot less insistent and loud. All right, that's it for today. Next week, I'm going to be back talking about another Drink Archetype, The Hourglass. See you then.