



# SOUL CARE

CHRISTIAN COUNSELING • SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

## The False Self in Masculinity & Femininity

\* Adapted from a variety of sources by Dan Allender, Larry Crabb, John Eldredge, etc.

Everyone adopts some False Self pattern that is particular to them that they use to hide and cover the naked heart which we are afraid to offer in relationship to others (Luke 12:1b-2). These are some of the things that Eph. 4 and Col. 3 call us to “put off” in order to “put on” the qualities of Christ and reflect the Fruit of the Spirit. While there are as many versions of False Selves as there are individuals, for the purpose of simplicity, below are 8 possible groupings - 4 for men and 4 for women. For some people their False Self may be consistent with those in close relationship as well as those who are just acquaintances or co-workers, but for some their False Self becomes most clear only with those they have close, personal relationships with over time. And obviously, because the subject of these 8 types is the False Self and not the whole person, the focus of these descriptions is necessarily on the negative, false aspects of each.

*Exercise: Identify which one of the following is the closest description of the “mask” that you often present to others or that others receive from you, even if you are unaware of intentionally presenting it. Underline characteristics that particularly strike you as being present in your life and relationships. It would likely be helpful to get the input of other safe family or friends who love you and have known you for years.*

### Men:

**1. The “Take Care of Me” Little Boy:** Believing himself to be a weak individual, he presents himself as weak to those around him and subtly requires (demands...) that others take care of him. He is convinced that he doesn’t “have what it takes” to face the realities of life, so he puts pressure, often subtly, on others to take care of him. The message others ‘hear’ from how he relates is often “You don’t understand, I’m doing the best I can...” If others don’t come through for him, then they are at fault and more demands for help or pity are likely to be directed toward them. He is prone to lots of contempt of himself and a slow-burning resentment of others. He can even make others feel guilty that he has problems or struggles. To varying degrees He has ‘checked out’ on the responsibilities of life, and often plays his way through life or does mainly what’s necessary to get by. Often spending much of his life distracting himself with pastimes or unproductive activities, this man offers little of substance to his wife, children, or friends. Believing himself to not have substance or internal solidity, he isn’t interested in what he can become or only dreams about it as wishful thinking of things that ‘will happen one day.’ His main goal is to get through life with a minimum of problems. In extreme cases he may have a hard time holding down a job and finding his place as a member of society. He avoids making decisions and taking risks, except those that are sure of giving him a sense of well-being. He becomes an expert at letting others decide for him or allowing circumstances to deteriorate to the point that a decision is made for him – the ‘no decision [eventually] is a decision’ approach. That way he doesn’t have to face life as a responsible, creative adult, but can blame how things turn out on someone else or on circumstances. Usually he is very adept at self-pity and giving others the quietly angry silent treatment. He can tune out others and go to a fantasy world of pornography or visions of grandeur that eventually become clear will never come about.

**2. The Passively Aggressive Nice Guy:** Like the little boy, the nice guy is a passive avoider. He is also convinced that he doesn't "have what it takes" to face the realities of life, so he offers his pleasant exterior to others in an attempt to placate and distract them from the lack of substance in him. A 'people pleaser,' this man has learned how to seem like an active and charming guy and avoid conflict, but inside harbors resentful and judgmental feelings against others. Behind the Nice Guy persona is lack of strength and substance that others eventually sense. While the Little Boy (above) is actively or passively asking others to take care of and pity him, the Nice Guy is using his pleasant way of relating and 'serving' of others as a way of distracting them and himself from who he really is or what he's really thinking or feeling. When he does act on behalf of someone else, it will usually be after having received a detailed code of what he needs to do, so that his risk of disappointing or angering others is kept to a minimum. He lives by rules, by a code, by a list. He doesn't have the courage to act in a creative manner in order to enter another person's world, because that would mean entering a risky place with too much risk of things going wrong or being exposed as not "nice." This man feels most alive when others are praising him or paying him attention. When he isn't receiving positive attention he will often feel resentment beginning to eat at him. He will often seek getting back at others who don't come through for him, although not in overtly ugly ways that would harm his Nice Guy persona and expose what is behind the mask. He has channeled much of his sin into secret areas and behaviors, trying to preserve the Nice Guy illusion and even his own belief in it.

**3. The Distant Self-Sufficient Man:** While the Nice Guy and the Little Boy are passive avoiders, this man is more of an aggressive avoider. As a preemptive reaction against not "having what it takes," this man lets you know that he doesn't need anyone and that no one should expect to be close to him. He seems proud, self-sufficient, sometimes even arrogant, and often inflexible. He is the lone-ranger type. "I'll take charge. I know how to handle this! Leave me alone!" He has stifled the desire to have intimate relationships, except for using sex as a substitute for intimacy. He often is either too busy to be asked for relationship or giving off annoyed or angry signals that deter others from requesting involvement with them. This man's world often revolves around roles and activities that give him a sense of importance (a powerful position, influence, money, etc.), but that keep others at a safe distance and provide good cover for doing so. He will easily speak about his clients, his ministry, his possessions or his grandiose plans. He knows how to rally people to his cause, and can lead such a busy life that his spouse and children only get crumbs of relationship and intimacy from him – intimacy being something he is terrified of.

**4. The "Bull in China Shop" Macho Jerk:** This man, also an aggressive avoider, intimidates those around him by his distorted presentation of maleness, toughness and competency or his explosions of anger and rage. Also as a preemptive attack against not "having what it takes" or feeling that he does, but that no one "gets it" enough to recognize or want what he has to offer. This man presents a strong, aggressive front to keep anyone from thinking he is ever weak, confused or lost. He can come across as hard and intimidating and can hurt others by demanding that they provide what he wants, without regard for how it affects them. Often this man can be cynical and can use sarcasm hurtfully. He has also stifled the desire for intimate relationships, except for using sex as a substitute for intimacy. While this type of man appears tough and masculine, he is in fact scared and just as fragile on the inside – although he may have successfully kept people far enough away for years and those around him have not seen those fragile places (and he's often forgotten about them too). If ever a person in close relationship to this man calls him on his game, he is capable of exploding in anger that otherwise may appear dormant.

## Women:

**1. The Helpless Little Sweetheart:** This woman pulls for involvement through dependent helplessness and a plea to be rescued or not “abandoned.” She believes that “I must be taken care of if I’m to have a good life.” She can be sweetly seductive, often with a subtle, difficult to detect edge of manipulation. Her seduction, even when sexual, has the end purpose of enmeshing someone in relationship so they’ll be responsive to her needs, to taking care of her. Seduction might be as the “fragile” mother whose son ‘never responds to her’ or the helpless damsel in distress who needs a man to rescue her and be a strong leader for her. There is a sense in those relating to her and helping her, that something is being subtly pulled out of them – sometimes even over the phone from a distance. Often those in relationship with her sense that she feels they are failing her and there is an undertone of disappointment, and even resentment, that she communicates to those around her, but almost never openly or clearly.

**2. The Pleasantly Dutiful Helper:** A ‘good girl,’ this woman is the compliant people pleaser. A classic helper, she comes across as a kind-hearted woman who lives to keep the peace and to sustain those with whom she is in relationship at any cost. Her internal world is full of self-contempt, ironically accompanied by a lot of resentment towards others for how they have ‘taken advantage of her.’ Her soul is largely disengaged from feeling, except guilt, which plagues her. She’ll be committed to limiting and controlling emotion and will only allow herself small measures of pleasure or desire. Outwardly, she is usually an energetic worker, organizer and performer, but a woman who lacks the courage and godly humility to express real need to others. Consequently, as long as her effort is sufficient to resolve a matter, it usually goes well, but when it requires delegating or direct solicitation of help, then either the task or this woman unravels. She sees herself as a martyr, sacrificially giving her hands, but not her heart. She works hard for others, without inviting the recipients to taste or enjoy what her heart really has to offer the world, something she even keeps herself unaware of. She often puts herself in a position to be used by others, then resents being used and also often turns to deprecating herself for being selfish in needing anything from others. She usually makes sure that her sin stays in subtle, less blatant areas and behaviors, unconsciously hoping to preserve the illusion to others and even her own belief in it.

**3. The Volatile Party Girl:** This woman can be very enjoyable to be around, infectious even, and has the skill to easily draw a person into relationship with her, treating them as extremely important and close. When things are good (usually at the beginning of the relationship or friendship, but even after ‘make-up’ periods following a bad time) being in relationship with her just seems enjoyable and her capacity for passionate love and intensity can be intoxicating. But then, unpredictably, she can swing far in the other direction, and become very distant or judgmental, sometimes even cruel or violent. She’s complicated, unpredictable, even capricious. She’s learned to successfully use both types of contempt (other-centered and self-centered). Over a lifetime, she can perfect the ability to hate both you and herself at the same time. Her manner may be affable, winsome and inviting, but in a flash she becomes demanding and angry, and then back again once the internal pain and pressure has been released onto those around her. She is often articulate and can at times be relentless in her communication, especially in the midst of relational intensity (something she’s ambivalently addicted to). Her unpredictable swings often eventually

make relationship with her very uncomfortable and often results in others feeling like they have to ‘walk on eggshells’ to hopefully avoid the swing to anger, contempt and then despair. She struggles mainly with anger, insecurity, shame, a deep need for intimacy and a deep fear of abandonment – particularly in those relationships that get intimate and close. But she lets on to almost none of this – even with herself. She usually doesn’t allow herself to become too intimate, because she knows it will lead to a point that requires vulnerability and perseverance – which she desperately longs for, but fears deeply. She often interprets other’s movement toward her as their attempt to take advantage of her. Her external aspects can include seduction and fickleness in relationships. Once the enjoyment of a new relationship begins to fade or requires hard work, she finds some way to terminate or sabotage the union, always with the main culpability being the other (whether male or female relationships). Over time, she will often go from relationship to relationship replaying similar patterns, all the while convinced that others are the principal reason the relationships were unhealthy or ended. For some these patterns can involve periods of sexual promiscuity.

**4. The Competent Tough Girl:** Appearing confident, capable and self-assured, this woman can work with her hands and her intellect and offer her work much easier than offering her vulnerable, sensitive heart. Real relationship will often take a back seat to other things such as a career, performance in the home, ministry or service. She is engaged in activity primarily as a source of comfort and distraction. She is a very capable woman who on the surface is not self-deprecating, but prefers judgment toward those around her who fail to meet up to her “standards.” Only in the privacy of her own heart does she know that this is a cover for self-contempt and fear, and often with very limited awareness of that. Those relating to her sense the wall that keeps others from drawing close and experiencing or even seeing her heart. She feels above her own feelings, suspicious of others motives, and sometimes even flippant and arrogant in her evaluations of others. She perceives other’s movement toward her as their attempt to take advantage of her in some way, something she is good at ‘preventing.’ Because of this she avoids kindness and warmth seeing them as unnecessary, but also as weak, potentially leading to her being left lonely and isolated in the end. Seemingly self-assured, she comes across as strong, but not in an inviting way that draws other’s hearts to relationship with her. Her strong personality usually takes charge – in the home, office or church – leaving room for little else to develop in her heart and what she has to offer others. She may pull sympathy out of others for how busy she is, telling them repeatedly that she is just trying to get everything done. But, those around her sense that somewhere deep down inside she doesn’t really want to rest or connect with them or anyone.