

"Women Addicted to the Exciting Lifestyle"

The women in this cluster tend to be younger, impulsive, focused on material wealth, and addicted to the life style of using. They started using (often Crack) as teenagers and this early addiction seriously affected their social and emotional development. Most live for the excitement of the moment, use a variety of drugs, act impulsively without thinking about consequences, and seek immediate gratification. They have great problems with people in authority, and often appear disrespectful and resentful of having limits placed on them. They have likely been arrested and convicted of crimes such as theft, shoplifting, prostitution, and possession or sale of drugs. Many are in treatment as a requirement of their parole, and see the criminal justice system as their problem not their substance use behavior.

Most cluster members grew up in families where addiction and physical or sexual abuse were common. They lacked positive adult role models, and even families that looked "stable," often were just better at hiding their dysfunctional behavior. Many cluster members were given their first drugs by their parents or other relatives. Personal boundaries and privacy were not respected in their home, and cluster members learned early that their sexuality could be traded for favors, affection, and material things.

Members of this cluster often had problems in school. They may have undiagnosed or untreated neuro-behavioral conditions such as ADHD, ADD or specific learning disabilities. Some may have suffered Traumatic Brain Injuries. They had difficulty with authority figures, became unruly, were suspended, began to hangout with an older crowd, and may have gotten involved with the criminal justice system. Cluster members may also have had mental health treatment episodes. They may have "cut" themselves, threatened or even attempted suicide. Some have had eating disorders or sexual identity issues.

The women in this cluster appear to be addicted to the excitement of their lifestyle. They like taking risks, running with drug dealers, and/or the rush of living on the edge. Many have been exotic dancers or escorts. Some have engaged in prostitution. Some will barter sexual activities with either men or women in order to get drugs or meet their other needs.

Members of this cluster typically feel they are indestructible and that life without drugs would be boring. They also have a distorted sense of personal power and control. They have difficulty defining and establishing personal and sexual boundaries and many have children with different fathers. Members of this cluster can be easily exploited (e.g. sexually), but still see themselves as being the one manipulating others.

Cluster members have a materialistic view of the world which is linked directly to their feelings of self-worth. What they look like, what they can buy, and what they can provide to others are at the center of who they are. They learned to trade material things for their sexuality and are therefore able to provide things for other family members. This buys them "love" and a special status within the family. However, they may risk losing this status when they enter treatment.

Women in this cluster have great difficulty engaging in a recovery process, because to do so means giving up many of the material things they get from their life style. Drug dealing and prostitution pay the bills and also provide them with fancy clothes, jewelry, toys for their kids, and other amenities. They lack education and more traditional job skills and it is unlikely that they could make as much money from a regular job. In accepting treatment, they must also risk being frightened and unsuccessful. They are used to their street life and they have considerable anxiety about functioning in other roles. Their trauma histories have made them very fragile and they do not want others to see how vulnerable they are.

Women in this cluster are often referred for treatment from the legal system. However, they enter with a sense of entitlement. They act as if the program rules weren't intended for them and they have difficulty dealing with people in authority. They size up the other clients to see what they can get from them. Even when they help other clients, there is always a price to pay. They are in emotional pain (often from shame), but have isolated themselves from their own feelings. In groups and with their therapists, they have difficulty disclosing important information.

For many members of this cluster, their youth, ingenuity, self-confidence, and materialism can provide a basis from which to begin their recovery. They have "hustled" for food, shelter, clothes and drugs in the past, and their desire to succeed and to have "things" can be used as motivation for educational and vocational activities. Some have creative and/or artistic skills that they have been unable to utilize. They are able to "read" other people well and can influence what they do. Many have a sense of responsibility toward their children, which can also lead them to want to make meaningful changes in their lives.