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The High-Functioning  
Alcoholic

PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

# Alcoholism and Shame

The need for pride in recovery

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Throughout my personal and professional experiences working with active and sober alcoholics, I have noted a theme: [shame](#). Sometimes shame appears due to the "wreckage of the past" and regrets that alcoholics may have about actions while drinking. The most surprising form of shame is that many alcoholics get sober and feel embarrassed and fearful that others will find out. However, they

often did not feel the same emotions about their active [alcoholism](#) that may have been more public or obvious.

My hope for all sober alcoholics is that they can begin to feel a sense of pride for the courage they have had in facing their [addiction](#) and seeking help. Loved ones can be supportive in terms of giving positive feedback even though there may be lingering resentments. There is always time to work through those issues once the individual is stable emotionally and in their sobriety.

Dr. Brene Brown has explored the topics of shame and vulnerability in a way that has resonated with the public and resulted in over 6 million views of her [TED Talks](#)

As a result of her work, she has started a dialogue about this topic that is, in turn, decreasing these feelings through the process of identification and [education](#).

The movie "The Anonymous People" speaks to this theme as well, as it addresses the idea that the 12-Step culture embraces anonymity for many beneficial reasons. However, over time alcoholics in long-term recovery may become paranoid about ever revealing that they are sober to others. This secrecy is protective in early sobriety, but over time it may contribute to feelings of shame about being an alcoholic- even after getting sober. It also may prevent them from helping other alcoholics in the community or in their family, because no one knows that they are sober alcoholics. The movie discusses a movement of individuals identifying publicly as "I am an alcoholic in long-term recovery" to transition to a feeling of pride about this accomplishment. [The Facing Addiction foundation](#)

has made great progress in this area and I admire and commend their advocacy work.

May shame turn to pride for all of those who are brave enough to admit they are alcoholic and who seek support and treatment!

For more information and resources about the topic of high-functioning alcoholics, please visit [www.highfunctioningalcoholic.com](http://www.highfunctioningalcoholic.com)

#### About

Sarah Allen Benton, M.S., LMHC, LPC, AADC is the owner of Benton Behavioral Health Consulting, LLC that provides treatment placement, presentations/training, Mind Redesign and healthcare business consultation. She is also a Clinical Consultant at The Strathmore House transitional sober living in Boston, MA. She is a Clinical Consultant and former Director of Clinical Services at Aware Recovery Care in North Haven, CT. Sarah is author of the book "Understanding the High-functioning Alcoholic" and additional resources on this topic are available on her Website [www.highfunctioningalcoholic.com](http://www.highfunctioningalcoholic.com). She gives presentations and clinical trainings on the topic of high-functioning alcoholics and other addiction-related topics at schools, colleges, addiction treatment programs/conferences and to the general public.

Sarah was formerly a Therapist at Insight Counseling in Ridgefield, CT specializing in outpatient addiction therapy and a Primary Therapist at Turnbridge addiction treatment program for young adult men in New Haven, CT. Previously, she worked at McLean Hospital (affiliated with Harvard Medical School) at McLean Brook transitional living program for substance abuse and dual diagnosis treatment in Waltham, Massachusetts. She has also worked as a consultant for the O'Connor Professional Group intensive case management services for addiction, eating disorder and mental

health issues based out of Boston, MA and in private practice at Lynch Wellness and Recovery Foundation in Norwell, MA. Additionally, Sarah worked as a Therapist at the Emmanuel College Counseling Center in Boston, MA where she was the leader of the Alcohol Skills Training Program directed toward helping college-age problem drinkers.

She earned a Master of Science in Counseling Psychology degree from Northeastern University and has been involved in psychologically-based research studies through McLean Hospital, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Northeastern University and the Boston University Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders. She was formerly the Vice-President of the Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation of Greater Boston. Benton has been featured in a NY Times article by Jane Brody, has appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Today Show, The CBS Early Show, NPR and more. She has been in recovery from alcoholism since February 2004.