

# HER BEST-KEPT SECRET

## Why Women Drink – And How They Can Regain Control by Gabrielle Glaser

(Simon & Schuster; Hardcover; On Sale July 2, 2013)

“An important addition to feminist literature that calls upon women to reject a spurious equality ‘whose consequences in broken families, broken hearts, and broken futures, are all too real’ and face up to the problem of alcohol dependency before it takes over their lives.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“Conversational and persuasive—as if Vicki Iovine had written a Girlfriend’s Guide to getting sober—[HER BEST-KEPT SECRET] is full of encouraging and informative advice, and it’s sure to ignite renewed discussion about one-size-fits-all treatment options.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“That so many American women stand at the edge of a liquid cliff is a surprising and scary problem that Gabrielle Glaser illuminates powerfully. For those who have a loved one standing there, you will find hope here.”  
— Sheryl WuDunn, Pulitzer Prize-winning coauthor of the national bestseller *Half the Sky*

“*Her Best-Kept Secret* reveals the existence of an epidemic with profound implications for women and their loved ones. This compassionate yet authoritative book explains why millions of ordinary women are turning to alcohol to handle the strains of daily life—and what they can do about it.”  
— Hilda Hutcherson, MD, bestselling author of *What Your Mother Never Told You About S-e-x*

Have you ever noticed how book clubs seems to revolve more around giant goblets of Pinot Grigio than the latest literary thriller? How often have you seen a woman drain half a bottle of wine while making dinner? What’s the first thing many women do when they get home from a tiring day? They make a dash for the leftover Chardonnay in the refrigerator.

In **HER BEST-KEPT SECRET** (Simon & Schuster; Hardcover; \$24; July 2, 2013), journalist Gabrielle Glaser takes us inside a hidden-in-plain-sight epidemic—American women and alcohol abuse—and explores why the most common remedy for it, Alcoholics Anonymous, is particularly ineffective for women. She also introduces us to new and alternative solutions better suited to women’s bodies and psyches, including a combination of licensed therapy and medical attention.

While we’re all familiar with concerning images of sloshed sorority sisters downing tequila shots in Cancun and the martini-swilling singles culture propagated by *Sex and the City*, statistics show women of all ages are drinking more than they should, and in ever-larger quantities. Glaser began noticing this shift in the culture when she had her third child and friends began dropping off large amounts of wine for gifts. “One for you, one to share,” said one note. “Why would I drink a bottle of wine by myself?” she thought. She was nursing, for goodness’ sake. That’s because alcohol—and wine in particular—is an acceptable, legal way to muscle through the post-feminist breadwinning or stay-at-home life women lead. A striking trend is emerging: Women in their thirties, forties and fifties, appear to be getting through their days of work, and nights with teething toddlers and trying teenagers, or sick parents, by hitting the bottle.

By every quantitative measure researchers can document, women are drinking more. They are being charged more often with drunken driving; they’re more frequently measured with high concentrations of alcohol in their bloodstream at the scene of car accidents, and they’re more often treated in emergency rooms for being dangerously intoxicated.

The number of middle-aged women who entered alcohol treatment programs between 1992 and 2007 nearly tripled. That's especially telling: Disappearing for a month or more is difficult for anyone, but it's especially tricky for women who have children at home. A 2011 CDC study shows that women over 65 binge drink (defined as more than four drinks in two hours), on average, two more times per month than women in their twenties. Two large federal surveys also found that they have an 80 percent greater prevalence of having, or once having had, alcohol dependence than did the generation before them. And, in perhaps the most undeniable statistic of all, women are the consumers whose purchases are fueling steady growth in the sales of wine. Meanwhile, men's drinking, arrests for drunken driving and alcohol purchases are flat, or falling.

In **HER BEST-KEPT SECRET**, Glaser traces the history of women and alcohol in America—from temperance leagues, to Prohibition Era “tonics,” to the popularization of the California Chardonnay—and follows it through the feminist era to today, when the increased female college attendance and the high number of women in the work force appears to have driven more women to the bottle. The significance of this trend is troubling, not just for families and public safety, but for women's physical health as well. Studies show that alcohol has far more damaging effects on the female body than it does on the male, making the risk of related liver and brain damage higher.

All of these alarming statistics and measures also call into question the efficacy of the common prescription for substance abuse: Alcoholic Anonymous. Endorsed by America's medical and judicial systems, AA is used in more than 90 percent of rehabilitation facilities in the United States. For the first time, Glaser takes a hard look at this program, its origins and eventual adoption as the gold standard for recovery, as well as its practices, which she posits are not a one-size-fits all solution to alcohol abuse. In fact, AA methodology and its message of surrender can be particularly ineffective, even harmful, to women who often drink because they feel powerless in other areas of their lives. The organization has even exposed many vulnerable women to male predators, a more common problem than most people realize. Glaser shows how this issue (an open secret referred to as “The Thirteenth Step”) is beginning to be aired in public, just as a new kind of treatment better tailored to women's bodies and psyches, is taking hold.

Finally, she outlines and advocates new approaches to recovery, such as taking the drug Naltrexone, which help suppress the craving to drink; working with a therapist to introduce healthier behaviors (e.g. exercise, meditation); and learning to avoid situations that trigger the desire to drink too much. New rehab facilities using medical doctors and therapists are beginning to emerge as viable alternatives to abstinence-only AA programs.

Hailed as “an important addition to feminist literature” (*Kirkus Reviews*), **HER BEST-KEPT SECRET** is a fascinating cultural history that also offers new insight and hope to women who find themselves reaching for a third or fourth glass of wine night after night. With compassion and gentle humor, Glaser provides comfort and manageable solutions to these women and their families, many of whom are afraid to bring a long-hidden concern into the light and work toward a healthier future.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Gabrielle Glaser** is the author of *Strangers to the Tribe* and *The Nose*, and a journalist whose work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Mademoiselle*, *The Economist*, *Glamour*, *The Washington Post*, and *Health*, among other publications.

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For author photo or jacket photo, visit [www.simonandschuster.biz](http://www.simonandschuster.biz)

## A Conversation with Gabrielle Glaser

### **Q: What were the three most surprising things you discovered while researching/writing this book?**

The first was learning about how heavily Americans drank throughout the first half of the 19th century. The country was basically blotto – there was no clean drinking water, so even babies drank beer. The second thing I found fascinating was that there are so many progressive ways to help women who develop problems with their drinking that are very much under the radar. The third, and most surprising thing, was that the traditional methods we consider the gold standard – abstinence and AA – are really not very effective for women. And they are sometimes downright dangerous.

### **Q: What did you learn about women's drinking habits?**

I was fascinated to learn how the effects of recent history – women attending college in greater numbers, having more responsibilities in society – mixed with our brain chemistry, which makes us twice as likely as men to suffer from depression and anxiety disorders. I was unaware that men and women drank for different reasons, and that alcohol had a different psychological effect on women.

### **Q: Do you have any personal experience with drinking more than you should?**

I was overdrinking during a really stressful time – a cross-country move with three kids, leaving a city I loved and saying good-bye to my extended family. I realized it one day and thought how stupid it was, since it certainly wasn't helping me get through any of the stuff I had to get through. I'm a disciplined person -- I exercise, I drink a lot of water and I consume at least five fruits or vegetables a day. But for a brief period, I was drinking in an undisciplined way, and I could see how easily it could creep up on you.

### **Q: How did researching and writing this book change your drinking habits for the better?**

I make sure to take some nights off. I'm not sure that that's totally necessary, but some researchers, at least in Canada and Australia, say it's a good idea. I also drink a lot of water when I'm drinking alcohol. And I make sure to eat a lot of green, leafy vegetables, which are good at any time but especially help to lower health risks from alcohol. In Europe, this is common advice – mothers tell their daughters, doctors tell their patients. Here, it's sort of seen as giving you permission to drink more. That's not the point. The point is taking care of yourself, and taking control of your own behaviors.

### **Q: What's the good news for twenty-something women when it comes to drinking?**

The good news is that we understand a lot more about the brain than we ever did before, and there's no reason to believe that once a person develops a problem, it's going to be a lifelong condition from they can never graduate. This might be true for a small fraction of people who drink to excess, it's certainly not true for everybody.

I think it's also important to remember that scientists avoid the word "alcoholic" now -- they use terms like "alcohol use disorder" and "alcohol dependence." That's a big distinction. The word "alcoholic" is really something we need to move beyond. It's sort of a hopeless word, and a category that doesn't really mean anything.

### **Q: What's the most concerning news?**

The most concerning news for young women is this: sexual abuse is more likely to occur when women overdrink. It's also frequent in many recovery circles, particularly co-ed, 12-step groups. Women need to be very, very aware that if they do get into a problem, the best place to turn is to medical professionals who are aware of the progressive methods used to help people get better.

### **Q: What would you tell readers who believe a friend might be heading into the problem drinking realm?**

I would tell them to find a doctor who is experienced in treating alcohol abuse disorders with the most current forms of effective treatment. I would absolutely tell them to avoid Alcoholics Anonymous, which was designed by men, for men, in the 1930s, and has not kept pace with the times. It may help a lot of people, but there are many ways of getting better that are far more effective, and far more modern, especially for women. If your doctor is unfamiliar with the new forms of treatment, you can look for yourself on the Internet and come armed with some of the studies showing the effectiveness of certain drugs like Naltrexone, or find a doctor who knows about them. There are also many self-help groups that take a really progressive view toward women taking control of their habits through their own strengths.