

**Shrink Rap Radio #384**  
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**“Women and Wine, Her Best Kept Secret”**

**Dr. David Van Nuys Ph.D., aka ‘Dr. Dave’ interviews Gabrielle Glaser**  
(Transcribed from <http://www.shrinkrapradio.com> by Gloria Oelman)

**Introduction:**

On today’s show, I’ll be speaking with journalist Gabrielle Glaser and we’ll be speaking about dramatic cultural changes in the relationship of women to alcohol. Gabrielle Glaser grew up in Tangent, Oregon, the Grass Seed Capital of the World. She spent her teenage summers driving John Deere combines on her family farm, listening to an unusual mix of local radio programming: the Bee Gees, Marvin Gaye, Johnny Cash, and NPR. She was an indifferent member of her local 4-H sewing club, and her nearest neighbors were her grandparents. After high school, she attended Stanford University, where she received a bachelor’s and master’s degree in history. She started her journalistic career as a news assistant at *The New York Times* in Washington, D.C. She worked as a reporter at the Associated Press in Baltimore, Maryland, and Warsaw, Poland. From Eastern Europe, she also reported for *The Economist*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Village Voice*, and National Public Radio. Since the late 1990s, Glaser has examined social, cultural, and national health trends for *The New York Times*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *The Oregonian* in Portland, where she was a staff writer. She worked as a ‘County Lines’ columnist at *The New York Times*, and her work has appeared in many publications, including *The New York Times Magazine*, *Glamour*, *Mademoiselle* and *ScientificAmerican.com*. She taught feature writing at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, and won the Missouri Lifestyle Journalism award for her groundbreaking work exploring international and interracial adoption. Before her latest book: *Her Best-Kept Secret*, she wrote *Strangers to the Tribe: Portraits of Interfaith Marriage*, and *The Nose: A Profile of Sex, Beauty, and Survival*. She appears frequently as a commentator and a guest on local and national television and radio.

Now here’s the interview:

**Dr. Dave:** Gabrielle Glaser welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Hi, thanks so much for having me.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, I’m really glad to have you on the show. I love the way you start your book off in the prologue. The very first sentence is ‘My name is Gabrielle and I’m not an alcoholic.’

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Yeah (laughs).

**Dr. Dave:** And I thought that was a really punchy beginning and even though you conclude that you’re not an alcoholic, you did go through some soul searching about your own relationship to alcohol in the process of working on the book. So maybe that’s a good place for us to start.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** You know I think you're giving me more credit than is due when you say 'soul searching.' I went through a period of... and by the way I enjoy drinking, I look forward to it, I'm a regular drinker, I'm a moderate drinker but during a period of really high stress; a cross country move, moving from the West coast to the East coast, resettling three children, selling one house, buying another, saying goodbye to my family, my mother in law was dying and she lived nearby and she had been molested in the nursing home where she was. I mean it was a lot and there was a law suit involved, I mean it was a lot of stress and I found myself at night, pouring myself an uncharacteristic third glass for a couple of weeks. And I realized at one point, I was out walking the dog and prospective buyers were in the house looking at it and I was so anxious and I thought 'well, okay, fifteen minutes and I can have a glass of wine.' It was a quarter to five and I just laughed out loud because it was so absurd, a glass of wine at 5 o'clock was not going to change any of the situation in which I found myself. It was not going to help one single bit. The reality was still going to be that I was moving, that it was painful, that I had so much to do and in fact the alcohol actually made me less functional. So I just stopped drinking for a month, it wasn't hard and I have been very careful ever since.

**Dr. Dave:** Had you already started work on the book at that point?

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Oh, no I hadn't. No, no, no. No I hadn't, that was in 2008 and I got the contract for the book more than a year later, actually about two years later. And the idea for the book kind of came to me as a... I'd had a conversation with a friend who's an editor and we both noticed that all around us women were drinking more and she said 'why don't you look into that?' So it wasn't something that I generated. I wish I could take credit for the idea but I can't because it was really generated by a conversation I had with a really smart woman and who is my editor.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, smart woman indeed because I think you really unearthed some important trends that are worth calling out. Again going back to your intro in which you say 'I'm not an alcoholic,' you suggest that your book is actually a unique contribution in women writing about alcohol because the other notable books in this area have been written by women who *were* alcoholics.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, say a little bit more that.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** We have a paradigm in this country with regard to alcohol that really the only people who truly understand the devastation of alcohol and alcohol dependence are the people who themselves have experienced it. And while I'm not discounting those experiences, I learned in the course of researching this book that it's really sort of a monopoly, the idea that, and I hesitate to use the word alcoholic because that word is not used in science anymore, it hasn't been used in science for twenty years.

**Dr. Dave:** What do they use instead?

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Well the first term in 1994, the DSM-IV replaced 'alcoholism'

with 'alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence' and the DSM-V gave an even subtler distinction to that and now it's called 'alcohol use disorder.' Alcoholism is something that was a term really popularized by Alcoholics Anonymous and it really to me has the idea of, you might as well just have an invisible 'hopeless' in parentheses before the word 'alcoholic' because it really kind of implies a devastating, surefire, absolute end. If this person continues to drink, they will end up in the gutter, in prison, or dead.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Now we're getting a little bit ahead. I definitely want to drill down into Alcoholics Anonymous but I'm interested in some of the earlier parts of your book and you've already mentioned that you moved from the West coast to the East coast and so you kind of noticed some things about women that you knew, women that you observed and there were some interesting things going on in relation to women and alcohol.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Absolutely. I noticed a big change from the early nineties. I have three daughters and my first daughter was born in 1992 and when I got together with other mothers who also worked nobody was talking about having a ... 'oh, I'll meet you for a drink,' or 'we'll have a mummy play day, while the kids play we're going to have one.' It, and again this is just my experience but it never came up. I don't remember a single time in which it came up and when I had my third daughter in 2001 and at that time I did live on the East coast in the New York suburbs, I had her in the fall of 2001. Obviously the New York area had been devastated, the town where I lived lost nine men in the towers and it was an exceptionally anxious time but even so as a baby gift, I got bottle after bottle after bottle of wine as a baby gift.

**Dr. Dave:** For you, not the baby?

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Yeah, for me (both laugh) and I wasn't even drinking and the implication was 'you know what, you're going to need a lot of this.' And I chalked it up to the anxiety of the time and place but not long after that I moved to Portland, Oregon where I'm from and I noticed that women in that extremely relaxed city were bending elbows with the exact same enthusiasm that they had been in stressed out New York City.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, that I found fascinating. And your book is based not on just your own personal observations, you actually got deeper into researching material for the book and you discovered that in fact, a major cultural shift has taken place, at least here in the United States, in relation to women and alcohol. When would you say that shift began?

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Well, I did do a lot of research about women's drinking and it's a little tricky to pinpoint the exact time because women and alcohol were not technically even... women were not even included in Federal alcohol studies until the 1990s, if you can believe that. There were a few here and there but in general it was sort of the well, you know the Adam's rib theory, that if this is true is true for men, then it's got to be true for women.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah and you also describe in your book how researchers threw away data from women when they had it because it kind of complicated the picture.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Exactly. Their hormones complicated things, they didn't answer the questions the way men did, so they just tossed them out. Just tossed them out.

**Dr. Dave:** That is the shocking point.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** It's shocking, isn't it? It really is shocking and male heavy drinkers fit a trajectory that really – and this is bad science – but it really seemed to mirror what the researchers expected to see up until, certainly through the fifties and sixties and one lone researcher from the University of North Dakota, she was at Harvard at the time, her name is Sharon Wilsnack and she was the first woman in the United States to even raise her hand at a psychology graduate course at Harvard in 1970 and say 'you know what, we're studying human motivations for drinking here but there's not a single woman in this study. It should be called male motivations for drinking' and not a single professor had even noticed. It was a vast study over years and years of time, interviewing college fraternity brothers about their drinking habits. When they were drinking, after they'd been drinking, after they were super drunk and not a single woman had ever been included in the study. And that was 'well, that's human.' Yes, but it's male human.

**Dr. Dave:** Male blindness (both laugh).

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Right, exactly. So really it wasn't until the nineties when women started being included. Remember the big heart study brew haha, you know how women's heart attack symptoms were different from male heart attack symptoms, that women were repeatedly sent home from emergency rooms as just having panic attacks, when in fact they'd had a heart attack.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, wow.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Because their symptoms differed from men, that was a big study, I think, in the 1990s and researchers kind of got the message 'hey, you know what, we do this in a lot of areas.'

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** So to answer your question – it was a very long answer to your question. What we know is this – between the early 1990s and 2007, the number of women who were arrested for drunk driving went up thirty percent. The level of male drunk driving arrests stayed flat. The number of middle-aged women who checked into rehab between 1992 and 2007, nearly tripled. The number of women under thirty showing up in hospitals for being dangerously intoxicated, that almost doubled between the early nineties and mid two thousands, or mid, you know mid oughts. So those were some figures that really detailed a disturbing trend and while those numbers they're certainly solid, we know that you cannot argue with the number of hospitalizations, people coming to get their stomachs pumped and by the way men stayed flat and even dropped. The number of men who over drank and this is mostly young people, under thirty as I said, that stayed flat, in some cases I think it even dropped and women's just went up, up, up, up, up, up, up. Nearly almost one hundred percent, so that's pretty disturbing.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. You know one of my buddies just returned from a college visit where his daughter had just been enrolled and the level of drinking and alcohol that he saw there was really quite shocking. People put funnels in their mouths and whole bottles are poured in and it's become such a ritual on campuses. And the spring breaks of course are notorious for what happens in Florida and elsewhere and yet you sort of went into this with that sort of expectation but one of the things you found was that it wasn't just young women who were abusing alcohol.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Absolutely and that was surprising to me also because as a journalist I had covered many stories of young women on spring break and drinking and waking up some place in Mexico, they didn't even know where they were and that's just what I assumed the numbers would bear out but what really surprised me was that the numbers indicated a real shift in the drinking habits of older women, middle aged women, women between thirty five and fifty four. On one hand it wasn't that surprising because it's what I had observed but when you are a journalist you really reach for the numbers to substantiate what it is you're observing so you don't write some phony trend piece and this isn't a phony trend. Also the buyers of wine in this country are overwhelmingly women and that's another thing that has shifted in the past couple of decades.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, yeah and another thing that emerged in a fascinating way in your book is that when it comes to women and alcohol it turns out that it's largely a story about wine.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Right, right. The wine makers after prohibition was lifted really had to get their wineries in gear and they were desperate for new buyers to increase the market and Americans in the thirties and forties saw wine as an immigrant drink. It was for the skid row bums, it's what Italians did, that's Greeks did, that's what Jews did at the Sabbath table; that's not us. That wasn't American. We came from a culture in which beer and hard cider were our national drinks, after that whiskey. Every home on the frontier had a distillery basically throughout the eighteen forties and Americans drank a lot. They drank a lot of beer and they drank a lot of spirits.

**Dr. Dave:** Even the founding fathers you noted, you give some of that history.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** And the first lady, I'm looking at my bookshelf and she had a recipe book of five hundred recipes that she left for her granddaughter as a wedding gift and fifty of those recipes, literally a tenth of them, were for boozy drinks and there are about half dozen hangover cures as well. So, Martha Washington liked to party.

**Dr. Dave:** (laugh) This is not an image that has come down to us.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** No it has not. We have the idea that she was this fusty kind of Mrs. Claus like lady and she was a hotty. There are some images of her that the public never had, we just didn't get that image. We have that view of her in her nightcap and the day she married George she was a widow with four children. She was absolutely stunningly beautiful, she wore purple silk shoes with sequins on them and a gorgeous purple low-cut dress and she liked to live it up, she really did.

**Dr. Dave:** There was a plate in the book, a photo, a picture of a...

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Oh, yes that's right. Yes it's an image of her, yes.

**Dr. Dave:** I had to look and relook and say 'now wait a second, is this her? Is this Martha Washington? She was a hotty.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Exactly, exactly and she was. That was an image of her rendered by a very talented artist who was in New Orleans but there was some documentation was unearthed at Mount Vernon about five or ten years ago that really cast her in a new light.

**Dr. Dave:** And as you got into the story about wine – and I want you to continue that trajectory – but it was of particular interest to me inasmuch as I live in the heart of the California wine country and parenthetically, it is with some embarrassment that I confess I'm not really very much into wine. And people always assume that because I live in Sonoma County that I'll be a real connoisseur and I know what to order in the restaurant and so on...

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Right.

**Dr. Dave:** ...but I'm not and so I was intrigued about your account and I think you were just getting into this that initially the American public in general was rather averse to wine. They didn't like the taste of it even and that the California wineries really had to mount a major campaign to get America hooked on wine.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** They did and I don't want to paint them in and to say that they're like the cigarette companies; wine in moderation is good for us. The Spanish, the Italians, the French consume three times what Americans consume and they live longer, so there's something we're doing differently and we can get to that later but wine is not the bad guy. I think it's how women are drinking and the reasons they're drinking and the manner in which they're drinking, and it is typically wine because it is socially acceptable, that is unhealthy. But the wine industry as I started to say was very, very interested in expanding its market and one way that they did that was to find people who were naturally adventuresome. They found gourmet clubs in New York City, they found ski groups in Colorado and Lake Tahoe, they found travel groups in Chicago and they thought 'well, these are people who are going to be really interested in trying new things, so let's do tastings with them.' And typically these are people who are, they're called first adopters, they're kind of trendsetters and if we get wine into the hands of these folks, they'll help spread the word. They also were helped by Julia Child, who was on television and drank wine liberally and encouraged Americans to drink wine liberally as well.

**Dr. Dave:** Fascinating.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** And the wine industry worked very closely with her, again a California native, to try to promote California wineries and California at the time, especially in the 1960s and early 70s was the golden state, as you know. The Beach Boys and the surfing culture and the coolness of Hollywood was really something

Americans wanted a part of and the wine industry in the Bay Area and the wine country decided ‘well, okay they can have their Hollywood and they can have their Disneyland but we’re going to create a different, more refined universe up here.’ Many of the vintners were Italian Americans and they said ‘we’re going to make this a more European experience, we’re going to hark back to our ancestors and the countries of our forefathers and this is how we are going to position wine.’ Wine is part of a good life. Wine is part of good living, it’s part of California living, it’s part of a sunny lifestyle and they were very successful in promoting that ideal and promoting that little bit of California sunshine in a bottle that you could get at a wine store in snowy Minneapolis. You may not be able to look out at the beautiful ocean for dinner but you could have a bit of that California magic at your dinner table.

**Dr. Dave:** Hm, hmm and now we have wine bars – that’s an interesting phenomenon that’s happened in recent years.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Absolutely, yes. The wine bars are, really again, they’re geared toward women – ‘come enjoy a glass or two with your girlfriends after work, girl’s night out.’ There’s a lot of ‘girls night out’ emphasis in the female drinking culture. And the spirits companies have really taken a page from the wine marketers and they really aggressively market to women. Now one thing – we started to touch on it – Americans didn’t like wine because they were used to the drinks that they had during Prohibition which were sugary cocktails. They were super sweet, you know, like gimlets and rum and Coke...

**Dr. Dave:** I got sick on gimlets, when I was much younger and I’ve never been able to drink gin since then.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** You know I’ve never been able to drink Tequila for the exact same reason. I had too many Margaritas at one point and ever since then, just ugh, the thought of the smell is enough to make me ill.

**Dr. Dave:** Exactly.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** So Americans had this very sugary palate and it took a while but eventually the vintners came up with a wine, in particular Chardonnay, that was easy to say, nobody was intimidated to say ‘Chardonnay.’ It sounded pretty, it sounded feminine, it tasted a little bit like apple pie, there were vanilla notes and kind of, you know, spicy notes and it was kind of buttery, it was velvety to the tongue and if you recall in the nineteen eighties you couldn’t swing a dead cat without getting a snout full of Chardonnay at some wine and cheese somewhere. I mean it was just ubiquitous.

**Dr. Dave:** You know earlier you used the phrase ‘girl’s night out’ and one of my favorite observations is your comment that in a relatively short period of time we went from Prohibitionist Carrie Nation to Carrie Bradshaw of *Sex and the City*.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Yeah, absolutely. Less than a hundred years. Carrie Nation died in 1911 and Carrie Bradshaw was a cultural icon in the late nineteen nineties and early two thousands. I was really struck by that and that kind of ‘alcohol as a reward for the end of a stressful day,’ was really... It’s impossible of course to peg female

drinking to television shows but it certainly was portrayed as something that was normal and you were deserving of it and it was fun and all of those things are true, it's just that I think we carry it too far.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Now one of the historical things that you touch on in your book the WCTU – the Women's Christian Temperance Union, so there's some... you know talk about the shift from then to now, what was the WCTU all about?

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Well, that's an interesting story. The WCTU - Women's Christian Temperance Union – was a group of women who were inspired by the ideals of the second revival, so they're a kind of second wave Protestant churches that happened in the nineteenth century and the point was to cleanse the earth of sin in order for the second coming of Christ. There were several ways to go about this. One was to educate women because women were the moral arbiters. When the country had shifted from the agrarian revolution to the industrial revolution, men went off and worked in factories and the family economic unit of the farm shifted. The women were at home with one job and men were the breadwinners, they were no longer the co-producers with their husband of the crops and they were in charge of the family's morality. They were in charge of the family's religious upbringing, they were in charge of keeping everybody in line. That was their role in society and it was believed to be divined by God, right?

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** As these moral arbiters their role was specifically to educate women so they could promote higher morals for everybody, they wanted to abolish slavery, which of course was a fantastic crucial ideal and they wanted temperance, they wanted prohibition of all alcohol which they believed to be an incredible sin. Now we have this idea that before prohibition men were wandering like in a drunken haze on the streets of the United States, beating their wives, drinking all of their salaries, guzzling their salaries and leaving their families destitute. Did this happen? Sometimes, yes, of course it did. Did it happen in the incredible numbers that the Women's Christian Temperance Union said it did? No, it did not. Those messages that we still hear today 'oh, well the streets were full of drunks.' That was propaganda from the WTCU that passed along in ladies magazines and some of the most influential publications of the day, the Oprah of the day, was a woman who was the editor of a magazine called *Godey's Lady's Book* and she promoted the serial novel of a guy who wrote about the devastation of a small town when a bar, a tavern came to the town and anybody who was touched by alcohol, the evil alcohol, died. Terrible things happened to their family, if anybody made a penny off alcohol, something terrible would happen. Their kids would die, they would go blind, they'd lose their house, their house would burn and that was a morality lesson that basically went viral. This was a novel and it was the most... it was called *Ten Nights in a Bar Room* and that story, serialized novel, was one of *the* most well read novels of all time in American history and it was a novel, it was made up. And then because not everybody could read at the time it was made into plays that toured the country in revivalist tents and it was repeated so often that it was considered to be an absolute truth. An absolute, one hundred per cent 'yes, this is how it was, this is what happened.' When in fact, it wasn't. Did people drink too much? Yes. Why? Because we didn't have clean water, that's why. You could die. You could die from



the water. We didn't have water filtration, people got cholera, they got typhus from the filthy water that they drank and really the only safe beverage until the eighteen forties, when we did finally get sand filtration up and down the Mississippi River, was alcohol.

**Dr. Dave:** Was it the WCTU then that sort of led us into Prohibition.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Oh, absolutely, absolutely. They founded themselves, I believe, at the end of the eighteen sixties or seventies, I'm not clear exactly on the dates and finally at the beginning of the twentieth century they really were able to help turn the tide of the American public by zeroing in on the drinking habits of immigrants. The country had absorbed enormous numbers of immigrants from, I don't want to say heavily drinking countries but countries that drank. So, the Irish, the Italians, the Greeks, the Germans, all drank and this was a great offence to the Protestant ladies of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

**Dr. Dave:** I didn't know that piece of it.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Yes and particularly and what really happened, how it really caught fire, was after World War I, up and down the Mississippi River, along with the sand filtration, the German immigrants to this country helped bring many, many, many improvements; urban improvements. German society was both, while it was relatively agrarian, the cities were very sophisticated and when German immigrants came to this country, they brought that sophistication with them. They brought technological advances, they brought great... their breweries that were up and down from Milwaukee, Chicago, Ohio, throughout the Ohio River Valley, they brought their breweries and their beer gardens and German immigrant families would go to beer gardens on Sundays all together and the women in their finery would drink in front of the children and the children would also tittle and this drove the Women's Christian Temperance Union crazy. Likewise so did the Italian women drinking wine with their families at dinner, so did the custom, as is customary, the small children drinking a bit of wine with water at dinner time and they literally had spies. The WCTU had spies and they had shaming circles, that they would gather around a woman's house that they believed she drank too much and they would shame her. They would march with posters that said 'this woman drank too much, she's the daughter of the devil.'

**Dr. Dave:** Wow!

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Yeah, yeah it was extremely aggressive and not until the anti immigrant tide had truly turned after World War I, so anything associated with the Germans, anything associated with the German brewery was evil and that really is what helped pass Prohibition, along with log rolling from the dry congressmen to allow women the right to vote. The Nineteenth Amendment banning alcohol and the Twentieth Amendment allowing women the right to vote, were very much connected.

**Dr. Dave:** This is fascinating. One of the kind of leitmotifs that I think kind of runs through the book, sometimes stated explicitly and others not, is that this country has had a kind of a double standard in relation to men and women.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Hm, hmm, yes very much so.

**Dr. Dave:** And that it really shows up in the story about alcohol and how women are perceived. Talk about the changes that have gone on over time in terms of the public perception of women and alcohol.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** In the mid nineteen forties, Alcoholics Anonymous, we'll get to that in a minute, was very successful in promoting the idea of alcoholism as a disease for which the cure was the spiritual practice of Alcoholics Anonymous. And initially it was open only to men and that is because there was a very, very, very stubborn double standard that existed for female drinkers and female drinkers, it was... Men who drank were deserving of compassion because they had a disease but women who drank were promiscuous, they were sluts, they were driven by their sex drives, they had perversions and fetishes. There was a book that was published in 1948 by a psychoanalyst named Benjamin Karpman, I believe his name was and he wrote a book called *The Alcoholic Woman* in which he profiled three psychiatric inpatients at the largest and most prestigious psychiatric hospital in the country, St Elizabeths hospital in Washington DC, which was also the hospital of last resort. He decided to profile three female patients, who also drank too much and he, using the psychoanalysis that was common at the time, really drilled down into their sexual fetishes. He concluded that one woman was an alcoholic because she really was a closeted lesbian. Another woman was an alcoholic because she was – and I use the term 'alcoholic' in quotations, since I don't use that word and science doesn't use that word – but another woman had a drinking problem because she had penis envy and another woman had severe alcohol dependence because actually she preferred oral sex to intercourse and this was seen as an incredible perversion. And this book, believe it or not, was in print for twenty five years.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow!

**Gabrielle Glaser:** It first had one printing and then another printing and it wound up in mass market paperback through the nineteen seventies, I think the last printing was 1974.

**Dr. Dave:** My goodness.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Exactly and it was a book that you could get at the airport. It was one of those pokey paperbacks that you could get and it was complete, you know, prurient interest of the reader because it was basically pornographic, is what it was because he describes the sex act and I'm sure that's why people bought it. But that was so rooted in the minds of the American public that that was the definition, if you were a man...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, you also point out this double standard kind of attitude is portrayed in Hollywood films.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Absolutely and not only Hollywood films but also in newspapers today in New York State, for example, there was a tragic accident in which a woman killed eight people, including her daughter, herself and her three nieces. She was totally loaded, she was driving the wrong way on a winding highway and slammed into an oncoming car and it turned out she had a blood alcohol level of three times the

legal limit. And initially people really, before the toxicology report had been released, they were so sympathetic, she was the girl next door, she was the nice mum, she had a good job, she was a working wife and a good aunt. Then when the news came out, the tabloids had a field day excoriating her, how could she, how could she, the compassion turned immediately to contempt. Not long after that another woman who had been drinking had a bunch of kids in the car, one of them was killed as a result of her drunk driving and New York State passed a law that criminalized the driving of a child in your car when you had been drinking. Until that time it was a misdemeanor. In the nine months after that law was passed, I did a quick search of the arrests for women who had been arrested as felons under this new law and invariably, in all small papers across the state, women were put on the front page as 'Drunk Mum Arrested.' And men, it was about nine to one, no, more men were arrested for driving drunk with kids in the car but it was the women who ended up on the front page and men just appeared in the Police blotter.

**Dr. Dave:** Hm, hmm.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** So that double standard is something we've held onto and if you ask me why, I would say we still expect women to be these social, moral, religious arbiters in the family. We expect men to be boys, we expect men to act out but we don't expect that of our women, even though we expect more of them than ever before, by the way.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, yes. So you know I discovered your book through *The New York Times* review of books and the thing that really made me want to interview you, was their report that you don't think that AA is particularly well adapted to women. So let's talk about AA in general and of course I note that that double standard really comes into play there too but go ahead let's... I've been holding you off from talking about AA, now I'm going to cut you loose.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Okay, well it's not, you know as I found out, it's not, because I came to this book as somebody who didn't have a history of alcohol problems aside from my brief over drinking, I didn't really have experience in this realm and so I just assumed, well people go to AA and they get better, right? Because that's what I'd been exposed to, that's what I saw on television, that's what I'd read about in books, that's what people who'd been to it had told me and when I started looking at it, I went to some meetings and I thought, 'ha, ha, that's kind of weird, how do people get better with this?' It's a repetition of trauma over and over and over again, you hear these same stories and people get to talk for three minutes each and then you're cut off and huh, how does this work?' So I started looking into the science of how it works and I soon found out that there is no science and the reason there's no science is because AA can say whatever it wants but it's a religion and it's as easy to study in terms of scientific efficacy as is Catholicism or Judaism or Buddhism. And these are, on one hand if we say alcohol dependence is a disease and it is a multifaceted disease, then why we do insist that the cure for it is declaring that you're powerless, leaving all your ego to God, praying, giving these twelve steps, I think seven of which, at least five of which, I think it's five, have the word 'God' in them and which the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, the Court of Appeals in California that makes rulings for all nine, the nine westernmost states, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that it's unconstitutional to order any drunk driver into Alcoholics Anonymous because

it's a breach of the First Amendment. So when I started looking for the efficacy in how well it worked I found some really disturbing numbers and AA is difficult to study, they don't participate in research but even their own membership surveys show that of one hundred people who go to a meeting on January 1<sup>st</sup>, only five will remain on December 31<sup>st</sup>.

**Dr. Dave:** And of course they would probably use circular reasoning to say 'well that just shows how addicted they are.'

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Exactly, or 'these are people in denial' or these are people who 'oh, they'll be back when they're really bad, when they hit bottom.' And in fact the whole basis of AA was really a lot of people, out to kind of make a name for themselves. One of the first women to ever achieve sobriety within AA was a woman named Marty Mann and she was a very gifted woman in the field of public relations and she really knew how to spin a bottle because she cosied up to writers, to screen writers. She cosied up to a writer at *The Saturday Evening Post* and the writer wrote a story, basically some people believe she helped him write it, just lauding the virtues of Alcoholics Anonymous and it took off. It took off in terms of membership, there started to be movies about AA and the redemptive nature of AA and it became a cultural trope that the alcoholic blind man can find redemption through this group and then can see. Okay, it's great if it works for the very small, very, very, very slim minority of people who try it but we have so many other treatments now. AA was developed by two white guys, one of whom dropped acid and had séances and was an inveterate womanizer, who died of emphysema. He was never without a cigarette in his mouth.

**Dr. Dave:** This is Bill W.?

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Bill W., yeah and he had a fla... he was on hallucinogens in a hospital trying to dry out and he had a flash of seeing God and the twelve steps and you know, that's not science. That's narrative, that's anecdote, that's not a protocol, that's what he experienced, that's what other people who have followed it have been able to experience but with the caveat 'people who have followed it.' When you put randomly controlled double blind trials, which you actually can't do with AA, but even, let's say you look at AA as a methodology, it comes essentially on global studies throughout the world, it comes basically dead last, in terms of efficacy and long term efficacy.

**Dr. Dave:** Everybody believes in Twelve Step programs, you know based on AA. I have psychologist friends, I have counselor friends etcetera who have gone to Al Anon and so on and they swear by it.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** They swear by it and that's their anecdote and it works for them and I was actually at a party not long ago, where a psychiatrist said you're absolutely wrong, AA works, I've seen it work. I said 'you just said, you saw it work but the science shows that it actually doesn't.' And for women especially, the notion of saying 'I'm powerless, I'm powerless over alcohol, I need to let go of my ego, I need to give it all over to God' is something that many, many women find incredibly undermining and very, very painful. And AA can be sort of... you know the whole goal – and I've heard people say this – 'well she needs to be brought down a peg.'

Well, you know what, if she's drinking, chances are... you know women who are at risk for alcohol abuse are... women are twice as likely to be depressed, they're twice as likely to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, they're far more likely than men to have been sexually abused and far more likely than men to have had an eating disorder. These are all major risk factors for women and on top of that, women are coping with so many different roles today. Men typically are still the breadwinners of their family and even though there are a lot of stay-at-home dads out there today and that's great, typically men are still the largest wage earners of the family. If women work, they tend to make less money than their husbands and they're still doing the lion's share of the domestic duties, they're still the ones caring for elderly parents, who may live across the country. We don't have the same tight knit families that our parents enjoyed. We have kids activities that are so far out of control that you've got travel soccer, you've got travel hockey, you've got a million different things that kids are doing, so you don't have any free time and the kids don't have time to help around the house with the chores because they don't have any free time, so who ends up doing that? The mum. She ends up folding clothes and trying to work on her brief and trying to go grocery shopping and try to make lunches and even if her partner helps, the level of guilt that women feel for not doing everything the way they feel they should be doing it is enormous. And that's where alcohol comes in, 'well, alright, I'll just pour myself a little glass. Well, alright, that's so good I'm going to pour myself another little glass' and on it goes until sometimes there is a problem and it doesn't mean that those women who are over drinking are alcohol dependent, it means that they're in a bad habit that they can change. And you, as a psychologist, know that there's so much new behavioral work that people are able to do today, there's cognitive behavioral therapy, there are moderation techniques, there are harm reduction techniques that are used throughout the rest of the world with enormous success. And we don't employ those with the regularity that other nations do because we are stuck on this abstinence model.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, you mentioned harm reduction and in the book you mentioned Alan Marlatt, who I think was kind of maybe the originator, or at least the big researcher, of harm reduction. I actually interviewed him, so I was shocked to read in your book that he's passed on.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Oh, I know, it was very sad. He died couple of years ago, very quickly; he had cancer. Far too young. He really changed the paradigm in this country and you know, not surprisingly, I think it's really frankly worth noting that he was Canadian and he didn't have the whole Twelve Step narrative. He came at the notion of alcohol abuse, drug abuse really as an empiricist and looking and thinking about what works, what will work, how can we help solve this problem because this abstinence, one size fits all model is not working for everybody.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** We need to change the tools we have and we've got to put other stuff in the toolkit. And he did, God love him, he did.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, your final chapter looks at twenty first century alternatives to AA and that's one of them and another one that you mention is Naltrexone and that's another interview I did with a Dr. David Sinclair. He's an American but he's heading

up, I think, an institute in Finland and I believe he's using Naltrexone and I don't recall the interview, it's some time back, that I somehow have the impression that Finland was a lot more open to this research and this approach.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Absolutely, absolutely because even though the United States, the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of Naltrexone in the treatment of alcohol dependence in 1994, American doctors prescribe it with only the ideal of abstinence, the goal of abstinence in mind – 'take this drug, it's an opioid antagonist so if you take the drug...' Sinclair prescribes the drug an hour before a person is supposed to drink or is considering drinking and what it does is it blocks the brain's ability to release endorphins. Alcohol releases endorphins so it blocks the brain's ability to release those endorphins, so if you take the drug an hour before you're about to drink, you're not getting to get high. You're not going to get that euphoria that you feel after you have a glass, or two, or three, of wine. You're going to maybe feel a little bit but it's not going to have the same impact that it would if you were not taking the drug. He prescribes that drug for drinkers in Finland and has had an enormous success rate, published in peer reviewed journals, published in the *Oxford Journal* you know, it's not like the bingo journal, it's *Oxford*...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah (laughs).

**Gabrielle Glaser:** ...and that show a seventy eight percent reduction in the number of drinking days and the number of drinks consumed. So this is the use of the drug for harm reduction. It allows the drinker to drink in a controlled way that is not hurting no one. The drug is available generically, it's been around since 1963, it has very few side effects, in fact many doctors have told me that it is safer to use, much safer to take than over the counter Tylenol, which is very dangerous and it's far more free of side effects than the statins which are the most prescribed drug in the country. So why we don't we use it the way that it's used in Finland and now other countries in Europe? Well, because we think that people, if they have a drinking problem, should swear off alcohol forever and we need to change that because it's not working.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, AA has really programmed us to accept as an article of absolute faith that once you have been an abuser of alcohol you cannot become a social drinker.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Absolutely, that's what they believe. In fact I had people in the AA office tell me that my period of, you know whether it was three weeks or a month, of drinking slightly more than I should have, was a dangerous sign that I had beaten the path of alcohol dependence in my brain and that one day it was going to sneak up on me because it was a progressive disease. And that is just not rooted in science. That is like saying to somebody 'and the tooth fairy is going to come and get your tooth tonight if you leave it under your pillow.' That's not science. For ninety five percent of people who drink too much, that is not true. That may have been the case of *that* woman whose first, as she told me, her first experience getting drunk was when she was fourteen and she loved it so much it changed her life. Well, my first experience getting drunk was when I was eighteen and I hated it so much I didn't drink for four years afterwards, so that's kind of a different... 'that's what happened to you, that's not what happened to me.' And it's really kind of the tautology of 'okay, well this is my experience and this is the experience of the other people in the

room' therefore it's everybody's experience. You're a psychologist, you know how to read studies and analyses – that's not science, that's a story.

**Dr. Dave:** And so do you, evidently.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Yes I do. I've become very, very interested and extremely curious about how science is reported in the public, in the mainstream press.

**Dr. Dave:** And we need more of that kind of reporting that you're doing. You know I mostly interview psychologists, psychiatrists, analysts and so on but I have interviewed a few journalists and I think that journalists play such an important role, that you come to it with, you know good journalists, who have come to it maybe more objectively.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Well you know initially when I started writing the book I thought nobody's going to believe me because I am not, this is not, an addiction memoir. And the more I went into the reporting, the more I realized 'well, you know what, actually, that's good that I don't have... I'm reporting this objectively.' And I have strong feelings about it, I've strong feelings about the way AA has sold itself as the only way that people can get better and I think it's very dangerous and also a lot of women get hurt, a lot of people get hurt in AA. Twelve percent of the AA membership are convicted felons and they are released particularly in California where you have an enormous over crowding problem, they're released into the general public to attend AA as part of their parole plea bargaining and they go out and abuse people. There are sex offenders, there are financial criminals and they are, because of their felonies they can't necessarily get jobs, so who are they going to prey on – ah, the vulnerable people in AA, the newcomers; 'hey, I'll show you the ropes! Why don't we spend some time together, I'll show you the ropes.'

**Dr. Dave:** That's a sobering note.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** Yeah. It's a documented trend.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, you know this is probably a good place for us to wrap it up. We've really only scratched the surface of your book because there's so much more in terms of rich detail and historical facts, so does this feel like a good place to wrap it up?

**Gabrielle Glaser:** It does, it does and I appreciate you having me on, it was a lot of fun and you are a great reader.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, thank you. So Gabrielle Glaser I want to thank you for being my guest on Shrink Rap Radio today.

**Gabrielle Glaser:** My pleasure, thanks for having me.

#### **WRAP UP:**

I'm so glad I chanced to see that little blurb in the *New York Times* review of books. Unfortunately there was not a full review just a little note that it was a book of interest. It did mention that the author thought AA a bad match for women in general.

It was that comment that really snagged my interest. Fortunately I was able to reach out to Gabrielle and she immediately and affirmatively responded. You may recall from my reading of her bio that she earned both her BA and her Masters degree in history from Stanford. Those are excellent credentials, as is her work on the *New York Times*, for doing the kind of historical research that was needed for this book. As you heard me say, I really appreciate the sort of perspective that a well trained and seasoned journalist can bring to our psychological explorations on Shrink Rap Radio. They are able to gift us with an outsiders view and that's something that can help to keep our explorations on track and to some extent even to keep the fields of psychology and psychotherapy on track.

If you're interested in doing some collateral listening, let me recommend three of my past interviews, which I think you'll find quite relevant. First is Shrink Rap Radio #183 Mindfulness, Harm Reduction and Relapse Prevention with Alan Marlatt. The second one is Shrink Rap Radio #64, The Sinclair Method for Treating Addiction with Dr. David Sinclair and finally Shrink Rap Radio #331 A Jungian Approach to Addiction with David Schoen. I highly recommend this book to all who are interested in alcohol use and abuse as well as a female perspective on some of the major cultural changes that are impacting and have impacted women in these United States.

I learned a lot from my reading of this book and I'm sure you will too. Once again, Gabrielle Glaser, is the author of *Her Best Kept Secret: Why Women Drink and How They Can Regain Control*. And as always, you can use the Amazon widget on the <http://shrinkrapradio.com> site should you decide to order it. By the way you'll need to scroll further down in the right hand side bar of our site than in the past to see that Amazon widget.