

'Lipstick and Liquor' explores suburban secrets, stigmas

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'Lipstick and Liquor' explores the stigmas associated with women alcoholics. (Screen shot, courtesy 'Lipstick and Liquor')

Rachel Nania, wtop.com

WASHINGTON - In December of 2009, Emmy award-winning producer, writer and documentary filmmaker Lori Butterfield read a story in the Washington Post about a 39-year-old Woodbridge wife and mother who went missing after a minor accident that happened before a major snowstorm.

The woman, Julie Kroll, stumbled away from the scene, leaving her 8-year-old daughter in the back of the vehicle. Kroll, who was in recovery from an on-again- off-again battle with alcoholism, also left an open container of alcohol in the car.

Butterfield was instantly drawn to Kroll's story and how it was portrayed in the media.

Mary George, a friend of Kroll's, explains that she and other friends and family members had to organize a search party for Kroll because the police did not treat her as a missing person. Instead, Kroll was treated as a criminal.

Days after Kroll went missing, she was found dead.

After several years of research, interviews and production, Butterfield released her documentary, "[Lipstick and Liquor](#)," which explores the undercover world of women who drink.

"Something about her tragedy really compelled me to dig deeper into the issue of women and alcohol," Butterfield says. "That previous summer, the story of Diane Schuler made national headlines. Diane killed eight people, including herself, while driving the wrong way on the Taconic Parkway in New York. Toxicology reports revealed she was both drunk and stoned, but her family, especially her husband, strongly and publicly denied Diane had a problem. How could someone hide their alcoholism so well that their own family had no idea?"

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, alcoholism is the third leading cause of preventable deaths among women between the ages of 35 and 55. However, alcoholism among women is not talked about in society as openly as alcoholism among men.

"On an individual level as well as a societal level we need to shed this terrible stigma that goes along with women who drink too much," says Butterfield, who worked with Kroll's family and friends to produce the documentary.

"Women have more economic power these days and more freedom to make their own choices. They are out socializing more and drinking more overall. Liquor companies are actively marketing to women with specialty cocktails. Drinking in moderation is totally acceptable but when a woman, especially a mother, has a drinking problem, this double standard kicks in. Women are much more harshly judged in society than men, by their peers, their family, their colleagues," she says.

D.C. psychiatrist and author [Dr. Anita Gadhia-Smith](#) explains that a big part of the reason women hide alcoholism is because they are ashamed of their disease.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, women are 12 times more likely to resist seeking treatment than men.

"There is often a great deal of shame in having this condition," says Smith, who worked with Butterfield on the film. "As more people come out and talk about it, it gives others the opportunity to come out and speak about it, as well. You can recover from this disease. There is no shame in having it."

"As friends, co-workers, mothers, sisters and daughters, we need to have a more open dialogue about our drinking habits and we must provide more support and compassion to those women who need help," Butterfield says.

So far, "Lipstick and Liquor" has debuted in several cities throughout the U.S. On Sunday, April 21, the documentary premieres at the Old Town Theater in Alexandria, Va. There are two showings (3 p.m. and 6 p.m.), followed by a panel discussion with Butterfield and the film's subjects.

"It surprises me that there's not much out there like this film," Smith says. "It's personal yet inspiring on so many levels."

Smith adds that she hopes the film will not only help touch individuals who are struggling with alcoholism, but also influence policy surrounding the disease.

"We've had amazing feedback from our screenings. It is definitely an issue that has been crying out for more awareness," Butterfield says.