

Empowerment, self-defense motivating factors for texas women to hold concealed handgun licenses

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Texas women who hold concealed handgun licenses (CHLs) are motivated to do so by feelings of empowerment and a need for self-defense, according to new research to be presented at the 106th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

"A mixture of motivations made the [women](#) feel empowered—the thrill of being good shooters, self-defense, and being different from 'other kinds of women'—and propelled them to want a license," said Angela Stroud, a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin.

In the United States, 47 percent of men but only 13 percent of women own a gun. According to gender scholars, the disproportion is due to the association of guns, aggression, and violence with masculinity. Nonetheless, the number of female gun owners is rising.

In Texas, women obtained 190,000 out of the 800,000 CHLs issued between 1995 and 2009. Stroud interviewed 15 Texas women who hold CHLs to discover their motivations for becoming licensed. She found that gender played a central role, with guns reducing the significance of size and strength differences between men and women and decreasing women's [feelings](#) of helplessness.

"They were thrilled by their shooting competency because guns were

marked as men's things," Stroud said. "They developed a sense of confidence in their ability to defend themselves because they were personally rejecting the link between femininity and vulnerability."

For some women—including those who began carrying guns after being victims of a crime—obtaining a CHL leads to an increased fear of crime and sense of vulnerability when unarmed. This may be a result of the CHL licensing process, in which instructors teach their students to be constantly aware of potential threats. According to Stroud, women immersed in CHL culture begin to see carrying a gun as the only way to feel safe. This is a significant drawback to [guns](#) as a form of self-defense.

"Some of these women locate their strength and empowerment in their firearm," Stroud said. "When they are unarmed, this has the consequence of increasing their feelings of vulnerability. It is as though their sense of [empowerment](#) resides in their gun, not in themselves, limiting the extent to which CHL use ultimately empowers those women who use this form of self-defense."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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