WOMEN AND CRIME GUNS: STORIES LIFTED FROM THE HEADLINES
OPERATION LIPSTICK CRIME REPORT

YOUR TIME
HIS CRIME
HOLDING HIS GUN CAN LAND YOU IN JAIL.
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The cover of this report features the “His Crime Your Time” public service ad campaign developed by LIPSTICK for Boston’s mass transit system, billboards, public housing sites and other venues. Contact info@citizensforsafety.org to bring the “His Crime Your Time” campaign to your city.
ABOUT LIPSTICK

This report was produced by Operation LIPSTICK, an educational program that empowers women and girls to prevent their peers from being exploited to buy, hide, hold or transport guns involved in crime.

Boston’s District Attorney credits LIPSTICK with a one-third decline in gun crimes by women in 2013, according to the most recent data available.

LIPSTICK addresses a little-known fact about urban gun violence—women are supplying many of the guns. Men who can’t pass criminal background checks often use women to “straw purchase,” hide, smuggle and store firearms for them. Women are easy prey for gun traffickers, just as they are for drug traffickers and human traffickers.

LIPSTICK is the first program in the country to give women the information, peer support and organizing tools they need to keep crime guns out of their neighborhoods. LIPSTICK is women talking with women in churches, beauty salons, schools, prisons, and domestic violence and homeless shelters about the risks and consequences of providing guns to people who can’t get them legally.

Through LIPSTICK, women and girls who were part of the problem become part of the solution. When a man tells a woman, “buy this gun for me,” she will say no. When he says, “hide this gun for me,” she’ll know she would be enabling violence and risks going to jail. When he says “you’d do it if you loved me,” she’ll know that’s not what love looks like.

Leaders who call themselves LIPSTICK Ladies have adopted the campaign as their own.

“Women may not be pulling the trigger, but by supplying the guns, they could be contributing to someone’s death. We will no longer allow ourselves to be used to take a life.”

~ Pastor Kim Odom, Boston MA

They’ve incorporated LIPSTICK’s message in church sermons, community events, e-newsletters, kitchen table conversations, and their work with domestic violence victims. One LIPSTICK Lady organized a gospel festival featuring LIPSTICK. A youth leader created a dramatization of the dangers of straw buying. A Mary Kay representative hands out information as she goes door-to-door selling cosmetics. A former straw purchaser shares her story for the first time on social media to warn young girls not to follow in her footsteps.

LIPSTICK creates powerful women leaders who are making the right choice and helping other women do the same. By refusing to be used to buy, hide or hold crime guns, they are sparking a movement that will shift cultural norms for this generation and the next, create safer communities, and save lives.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Straw purchasing is one of the most common ways criminals acquire guns, accounting for almost 50% of trafficking investigations by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Research shows that firearms purchased by women are disproportionately used to commit crimes.

The news reports compiled in this study confirm what academic research, police, court records and interviews with federally licensed firearms dealers all point to: men who cannot legally purchase guns often use women to “straw purchase” guns for them.

Some women straw purchase multiple guns in a single transaction. In many cases they are part of larger, organized, multistate trafficking operations that market crime guns in cities across the country.

Many women agree to act as straw purchasers out of friendship, fear or misguided love. Drugs and economic pressures are also common factors.

Much attention has been focused on the fact that the overwhelming majority of perpetrators who commit crimes with guns are male. The role women play, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes through coercion, in enabling these crimes has been largely overlooked—until now.

This report shows how women arm firearms traffickers and other criminals. Most importantly, it shows why a successful strategy to curb the criminal violence wracking our communities must also involve women.

“The more support LIPSTICK gets, the more women they’ll be able to reach.”
~ Mayor Martin Walsh, Boston, Massachusetts

University of Chicago Crime Lab

One-quarter of Chicago’s crime guns are traced to women in cases where guns were purchased and quickly used in crime.

This report demonstrates the need to educate women about the risks and consequences of straw purchasing. Contact LIPSTICK at info@citizensforsafety.org to bring our proven prevention and intervention strategies to your community.
INTRODUCTION

Women play an outsized role in the marketplace for crime guns.

Women are often recruited to buy guns for felons and others who can’t pass criminal background checks. This is what’s known as a “straw purchase.” It is one of the most common ways guns end up in the hands of people legally barred from owning them. The guns are often used in homicides and other violent crimes.

Operation LIPSTICK has compiled a report of news stories of women straw purchasers in every region of the country.

Almost all of the cases are relationship-based crimes: boyfriend-girlfriend, husband-wife, brother-sister, even grandmother-grandson. Some women straw buy guns because they need cash. One woman did it for Percocet and diapers. Many are victims of domestic violence.

Prosecutors say many women see straw purchasing as a victimless crime and have little or no understanding of the consequences.

And the consequences are calamitous. Straw purchasing by women contributes to unremitting cycles of violence in urban communities. Women provided the guns used to murder a Philadelphia mother’s only son in a dispute over a parking space, a pregnant police officer in Omaha, a Chicago police officer and Iraq War veteran, a mother caught in crossfire in Newark, and many others. Women straw buyers pay a price too. They end up losing their children, jobs, homes and freedom. Many are serving multiple-year prison sentences and have a permanent criminal record.

Women depicted in this report have moved hundreds of guns into the hands of drug dealers, convicted felons, domestic abusers, gang-involved youth, and others who cannot obtain guns legally. They have been part of organized gun trafficking rings. One woman bought 40 guns in just two transactions. In many cases, women straw buyers made repeated visits to the same gun shop.

Some were arrested because alert gun dealers and employees tipped off police.

Few of the guns trafficked by women are accounted for; many remain on the streets today, available to be used in criminal acts of violence that plague our cities.

This is a non-exhaustive list. It includes only some of the cases of women straw purchasers that have turned up in the media. It does not include cases involving women who hide, hold and carry guns for prohibited purchasers. Their activities often go undetected and unreported.

Women throughout the country buy, hide, store and transport guns illegally every day. These stories only begin to reveal the magnitude of the problem.

Straw Purchasing Statutes

Straw purchasing of firearms intended for other people is a federal crime punishable by ten years in prison and a $250,000 fine. State laws and sentencing guidelines vary depending on how the gun is used, how many guns were purchased, whether the guns were trafficked, judicial discretion, and other relevant factors.

~ United States Dept. of Justice

Don’t Lie for the Other Guy

The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), the trade association for the firearms industry, partnered with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Office of Justice Programs (OJP) to create a national campaign called Don’t Lie for the Other Guy. The program educates gun sellers and the public about the consequences of illegal firearm purchases.
FINDINGS

Following are our seven findings about women engaged in the straw purchase of firearms. Appendix 1 includes additional cases reported in the news.

1) Relationship-based crimes
A majority of the cases are relationship-based crimes. Women make straw purchases for their boyfriends, relatives and friends. Wives, sisters and other female family members are easy prey. They are often motivated by love, loyalty or fear of reprisal if they refuse. Feeling vulnerable or dependent on a man for protection, money or approval, women become enablers in a culture of violence that victimizes them and adversely impacts their communities. Examples:

- Six Pennsylvania women were arrested in a straw purchasing investigation that netted 51 guns. Former Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham said, “We have seen the same revolting picture over and over again—women provide guns for their drug suppliers, boyfriends, former boyfriends, the father of their children.”

“Straw-purchase probe leads to arrests” – Philadelphia Inquirer 8/17/2007

- A college-bound valedictorian prep school student in New York City distributed guns for her boyfriend who was a member of a violent street gang. He also instructed her on how to shoot, saying “head shots only.”


- A 26-year-old Georgia woman pleaded guilty to straw purchasing a gun for her boyfriend. He used it to kill an Omaha police officer. Court documents show the man was texting the woman as she was inside the pawnshop, directing her on what to buy.

“Jonesboro woman admits to lying about gun purchase” – Clayton News-Daily 8/19/2015

What is a straw purchase?
A straw purchase is a criminal act in which a person buys a gun (or guns) on behalf of someone legally prohibited from owning guns. Straw purchasers are usually people hired by trafficking rings, or friends, relatives, spouses or girlfriends of people who cannot pass a criminal background check. Straw purchasers break the law when they answer “yes” to this question on purchase forms: “Are you the actual transferee/buyer of the firearm(s) listed on this form? Warning: You are not the actual buyer if you are acquiring the firearm(s) on behalf of another person.”
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"Straw purchasers are almost always family members or girlfriends."
~ Federal prosecutor

- A 22-year-old Pennsylvania woman bought two handguns for her boyfriend who had a felony record. She faces a five-year mandatory minimum sentence.
  
  "Chester woman convicted in straw purchase case" - Delaware County Daily Times 8/27/14

- A Georgia woman bought five handguns for her brother, a convicted felon, at a pawnshop in Georgia, and another gun outside in the parking lot. The guns were recovered at crime scenes in New Jersey.
  
  "Straw Purchase Leads to Prison Sentence" - Today's Pawnbroker 4/9/2012

- A Kansas felon had his grandmother buy a shotgun for him, then turned it on his eight-year-old son and himself.
  
  "Grandmother buys shotgun felon used in Kansas murder-suicide" - Kansas City Star 7/9/2015

- A Philadelphia woman had a drug problem and an empty wallet, so when her neighbor, a convicted felon, asked her to buy a gun, she agreed. He killed a teenager and attempted to shoot two police officers with the gun she bought.
  
  "Hands that hand a gun to a killer" - Philadelphia Inquirer 11/2/2009

- A 48-year-old New York state woman bought four guns for a convicted felon in exchange for cocaine and cash. The guns were used in drug-related crimes in Buffalo.
  
  "Bradford woman gets year in prison for buying guns for felon" - Buffalo News 1/10/2014

2) Straw purchasers are paid in drugs
Crime gun trafficking and drugs are often intertwined. Many women who straw purchase guns are struggling with substance abuse issues and need cash or are paid with drugs. **Examples:**

- A 27-year-old Pennsylvania woman, a single mother, was sentenced to 5-to-10 years in prison for the straw purchase of three handguns. She was paid a few hundred dollars for the weapons. She said she needed the money for diapers and Percocet, a prescription narcotic.
  
  "Woman gets 5–10 years in prison for straw gun purchase" - Delaware County Daily Times 1/9/2015

- A Philadelphia woman had a drug problem and an empty wallet, so when her neighbor, a convicted felon, asked her to buy a gun, she agreed. He killed a teenager and attempted to shoot two police officers with the gun she bought.
  
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  "Bradford woman gets year in prison for buying guns for felon" - Buffalo News 1/10/2014

- A 38-year-old Vermont woman was charged with buying a gun the crack cocaine dealer she lived with used in a fatal shootout.
  
  "Did city woman lie while buying weapon used in drug killing?" - Rutland Herald 5/29/2008

- Two Pennsylvania women were charged with buying handguns for a New Jersey drug dealer in exchange for heroin.
  
  "Trio bought guns illegally for Trenton drug dealer" - Bucks County Courier Times 1/16/2015

FINDINGS

"She needed the money to buy Percocet and diapers."

**U.S. Attorney Office news release 5/5/2015**
3) Some women are driven by economic considerations to become straw purchasers
They are remunerated with cash, rent money, food and other perks. **Examples:**

- A gun trafficking ring paid a female college student in Mississippi $50 to $100 to make straw purchases and hide the guns in her dorm room. One of the trafficked guns traced to the ring was used to kill an off-duty police officer and Iraq War veteran in Chicago.
  
  “State laws, family ties create a highway for illegally purchased guns” – Chicago Tribune 9/18/2010

- A quiet Texas woman who “couldn’t resist the promise of easy money for precious little work” funneled 77 guns to drug cartels. At least a dozen women in the past two years have surfaced in federal gun-trafficking cases, according to court records. Women are paid as little as $100 per trip.
  
  “Gun traffickers recruiting women as buyers” – USA Today 8/23/2009

- Two Boston women were charged with illegally buying guns in Alabama for resale on Boston streets. Authorities say they hatched their plan after learning they could turn a quick profit.
  
  “Two Boston women arrested for unlawful transport of firearms” – DEA press release 1/18/2006

4) Women working for trafficking rings can move large quantities of guns to illegal markets
Gun trafficking rings look to women to buy guns because the women have clean records and fly under police radar. Ringleaders direct women to visit multiple stores and/or make high-volume purchases. These women can be responsible for putting large numbers of guns into criminal hands. **Examples:**

- The wife of a former Ohio cop-turned-gunrunner straw purchased 168 guns. Weapons traced to the ring have turned up in six states, Washington, D.C. and at a Canadian border crossing.
  

- A female college student in Ohio who made Dean’s List was arrested as straw purchaser.
  “I knew nothing about buying guns, but I was buying them in large quantities,” she said.
  
  “The dangers of lying and buying” – WKYC-TV Cincinnati 5/17/13

- A Brooklyn woman and three other women were charged with being part of a gunrunning ring that purchased 70 guns at Florida gun shows and smuggled them to New York City on Chinatown buses.
  

- An Arizona woman was apprehended driving to the Mexican border with 20 AR15 rifles, 200 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition and several bulletproof vests. Her nine-year-old son was in the car.
  
  “Women gunrunners supply Mexico cartels” – KTVK-TV Arizona 3/9/2015
• Five Texas women straw purchasers were part of a trafficking ring that acquired 55 guns to send to Mexican drug cartels.

“Ten sentenced after buying guns for Mexican cartels” – The Monitor 3/1/2012

• A Texas woman straw purchaser bought five assault rifles over a six-day period. She attempted to buy two more rifles but was denied the sale.


5) Straw purchasers are often unaware of the consequences
The women involved in straw purchasing guns are often unaware they are committing a serious crime. Too often, the first time they realize the gravity of the situation is when they are questioned by police as the buyer on record of a gun involved in a crime. They don’t understand they could go to jail and often don’t connect their actions with shootings and other violent crimes in their own neighborhoods. Examples:

• When a 21-year-old Virginia woman was told she was being charged with lying on gun purchase forms, she said, “Is that all?” She was arrested as part of a gunrunning ring that authorities say recruited numerous women, including welfare mothers and college students, to make straw purchases in Virginia. The guns were recovered at crime scenes in New York City, Baltimore and Syracuse.

“Federal agents trace guns to Virginia buyers” – Virginian-Pilot 1/29/2003

• A single mother who lived with her mother and daughter in Chicago told police she bought four handguns for an acquaintance with a criminal record. She didn’t know she was committing a felony that can bring up to 15 years in prison.

“Single mom who bought weapon for convicted felon is now serving a four-year sentence” – Chicago Tribune 5/12/2013

• A 21-year-old woman bought the guns her neighbor, a convicted murderer, used to kill his sister and two firefighters. According to her mother, the daughter had no idea that what she was doing was wrong.

“Nguyen should be the last straw” – Rochester Democrat and Chronicle 9/20/2014

• A Pennsylvania mother was found guilty of straw purchasing a handgun for a friend who was convicted of felony burglary. The woman apologized to the court, saying her actions were not meant to hurt anyone.

“Secane Woman found guilty of straw purchase of handgun” – Delaware County Times 12/19/13

6) Vigilant gun dealers lead to arrests
Many female straw purchasers have been apprehended after licensed firearm dealers spotted suspicious behavior and reported it to law enforcement authorities. Women straw purchasers are often unable to answer questions about the guns they are buying. Their lack of familiarity with guns can be a red flag for the store owners and employees. Examples:

• Gun store employees in Georgia alerted authorities to a trafficker subsequently charged with using his pregnant girlfriend and her wheelchair-bound father to move 125 guns from Atlanta to the San Francisco Bay Area.

“Follow the guns: From Georgia to Bay Area streets” – Contra Costa Times 7/27/2012
• A tip from a Pennsylvania gun store owner led to the arrest of three women straw purchasers charged with supplying guns used in carjackings, shootouts with police and robberies of fast food restaurants and banks.

“Straw buyers obtain weapons used to rob banks” - Philadelphia Inquirer 2/9/2006

“I ask the buyers, ‘Do you understand what you are getting yourself into here?’ More often than not, they are afraid of the person who’s put them up to the purchase.”
~ Gun store owner

• A Maryland gun dealer notified police after a woman purchased a 9mm handgun and gave it to a man who had earlier failed a background check due to convictions on assault and weapons charges.

“Man with previous convictions guilty in straw purchase of gun” – Baltimore Sun 8/3/2001

• Employees at an Indiana gun store alerted police after they saw a man, later identified as a convicted methamphetamine dealer, sitting outside in his vehicle while his girlfriend came into the store and bought a rifle. Store workers denied her attempt to buy a handgun a few days later because of the suspicious activity.

“ATF raid near South Bend yields federal gun charges” – South Bend Tribune 7/23/2015

• A saleswoman at a Pennsylvania gun store tipped off authorities when a suspicious middle-aged woman purchased two handguns. The woman later admitted she had straw purchased a total of six guns for a convicted felon.

“Woman and felon arrested for alleged ‘straw’ gun buys” – Philadelphia Inquirer 10/21/2012

7) Straw purchasing is not socially taboo

Women have recruited their female friends and family members to participate in gun trafficking, indicating the behavior is accepted among certain groups. Social norms fail to make straw purchasing morally reprehensible, and community-based social pressures to discourage women from acting as straw buyers are lacking. **Examples:**

• A female friend of a drug dealer recruited her best friend, an unemployed single mother, to buy four guns at a Georgia gun store. They later returned to the same store and bought 22 more guns. One of the guns was used to kill the mother of twin six-year-old girls.

“Trial opens secret world of gun smugglers” – Newark Star Ledger 12/14/2008

• A Washington, DC-based ATF veteran said, “It’s hard to figure how [women] get manipulated into buying a gun for a person who is not a good person. I’ve had women tell me, ‘He just asked me to do it.’ The way they see it is, if a friend asks you to do something for them, why wouldn’t you do it?”

“Angels of Death” – Contently.org 8/2014

**Professor David Hemenway**

*Director, Harvard Injury Control Research Center, Harvard School of Public Health*

“No woman should be put in a situation where they’re asked to commit a felony and purchase a gun for their boyfriend. The social norms should not allow that. As women have helped reduce drunk driving, women can mobilize to reduce firearm crimes.”
RECOMMENDATIONS

Peer-to-peer education, outreach and leadership development.

Peer-led public awareness and education programs can prevent women from being drawn into the criminal justice system as straw buyers. Educational programs can create authentic leaders, mentors and spokespeople who can help shift cultural norms and make it socially and morally unacceptable for a woman to buy guns illegally.

Peer-to-peer education programs offer credible messengers to audience members who in turn carry the message to others. The programs can reach women in churches, community centers, schools, workplaces, beauty salons and other places women congregate.

Public awareness campaigns for mass transit and other public venues can help prevent straw purchase crimes by warning women of the risks and consequences.

Support for domestic violence victims.

Women straw purchasers are often involved in abusive or dysfunctional relationships. They may feel physically threatened or dependent on the man for shelter, money or approval.

Support services, including safe houses, escape plans, counseling and hotlines, can help women make informed choices and refuse to be used to buy guns illegally.

Clinical protocols.

Social service and health care providers often encounter women who are at the greatest risk of being exploited to straw purchase guns. But they are missing essential opportunities to protect women and prevent them from enabling gun crimes.

Clinical guidelines and protocols can help service providers identify and counsel at-risk women and prevent them from being exploited to buy guns illegally.

More research.

There is a dearth of research on female straw purchasing and the nexus of crime gun trafficking, drug trafficking and human trafficking. More research is needed to understand the scope, nature and prevalence of straw purchasing by women. Additional research can inform public policy and clinical practice by identifying risk factors and opportunities for intervention and prevention.

Suffolk County District Attorney Dan Conley

“As a prosecutor for more than 20 years, I’ve seen that experienced offenders have no qualms about using young women to carry, store and even obtain their weapons through straw purchases. By educating women, and empowering them to refuse to make straw purchases, women of every age can make our streets safer. I’ve seen that social forces like peer pressure can really change people’s behavior just as effectively as legislation and criminal sentences—perhaps even more.”
1. Staci Dawson
   22, Chester, PA – Arrested for straw purchasing two handguns.

2. Dawn Nguyen
   25, Rochester, NY – Bought weapon for a neighbor with felony record. He used the gun to kill his sister and two firefighters. She is serving an 8-year sentence.

3. Afrika Owes
   New York City - Provided guns to her drug kingpin boyfriend when she was 16-years-old.

4. Ashley Judge
   27, Conshohocken, PA – Straw purchased handguns for money to buy diapers and prescription painkillers. Serving 5-10 year sentence.

5. Rashandra Riley
   Cleveland, OH - Dean’s List college student arrested after straw purchasing 40 handguns. “I didn’t really know what I was getting into.”
APPENDIX 1: CASES

The entries listed below include media sources, headlines, dates, states involved, and case summaries.

HOMICIDES

Women straw purchasers are responsible for providing guns used to commit homicides. The women typically have little understanding their actions could lead to someone’s death.

Kansas

Felon used his grandmother to buy a gun, then turned it on his eight-year-old son and himself.

“Grandmother buys shotgun for felon in murder-suicide” – Kansas City Star 7/9/2015

Georgia, Nebraska

Georgia woman straw purchased gun that killed pregnant police officer.

“Gun used to kill Officer Orozco traced to Georgia” – KETV Omaha 7/7/2015

Pennsylvania

Woman straw purchased gun used in triple homicide.

“Trial begins for ‘straw purchase’ of weapon” – Altoona Mirror 6/23/2015

New York

Convicted felon used female neighbor to buy guns, then ambushed and killed two firefighters.

“Straw Purchaser Gets 8 Years in Prison” – New York Times 9/18/2014

Pennsylvania

Abused girlfriend bought gun her boyfriend used to kill 24-year-old college student in dispute over parking space.

“Event examines unique power of Ardmore women to stop gun violence” – Mainline Media News 8/16/2013

Former Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham

“We have seen the same revolting picture over and over again, which is that women have been providing guns for their drug suppliers, their boyfriends, their former boyfriends, the father of their children. They are incapable of lawfully purchasing guns anywhere, and so the women do it for them.”

Illinois, Mississippi

Female college student bought guns for a trafficking ring and hid them in her dorm room. One of the guns she bought was used to kill an off-duty police officer and Iraq War veteran.

“State laws, family ties create a highway for illegally purchased guns” – Chicago Tribune 9/18/2010

Washington, DC, Virginia

Woman bought gun for teen. He used it to steal a truck and kill a good Samaritan who tried to intervene.


Vermont

Woman bought gun for drug dealer who used it in fatal shootout.

“Did city woman lie while buying weapon used in drug killing?” – Rutland Herald 5/29/2008
New Jersey, Georgia
Underage female friend of drug dealer recruited her best friend, an unemployed new mother, who bought four guns at Georgia gun store. She made $300 on the transaction. A few weeks later, she returned to the same store and bought 22 more guns. One of the guns was used to kill a working mother of twin six-year-old girls caught in crossfire.

“Trial opens secret world of gun smugglers” – Newark Star Ledger 12/14/2008

Michigan, Illinois
Former tax preparer and convicted domestic violence abuser used a woman to buy guns for him in two trips to the same pawnshop. “That, in many ways, is the reality of ... getting a gun in Chicago,” – Illinois prosecutor. The abuser used the guns to rob a local bank and shoot a police detective in the head. The officer died.

“All in the Family”
Wives, sisters and other female family members are easy prey for traffickers. Feeling vulnerable or dependent on the man-of-the-house for protection, money or approval, women become enablers in a culture of violence that victimizes them and plagues their communities.

Pennsylvania
Woman bought handguns for boyfriend who had felony record.

“Chester woman convicted in straw purchase case” – Delaware County Daily Times 8/27/14

Illinois
Chicago man with criminal record wanted guns. So he turned to his friend’s sister, who worked as a security guard, lived with her mother and teenage daughter, had a clean record, and needed cash. She was paid $800 to buy four guns for him at local gun stores. “Many straw purchasers see the opportunity as easy money and a victimless, paperwork crime.”

“Single mom who bought weapon for convicted felon is now serving a four-year sentence.” – Chicago Tribune 5/12/2013

Georgia, New Jersey
Woman bought five handguns for her brother, a convicted felon, at a pawnshop in Georgia and bought another gun outside in the parking lot. The guns were recovered at crime scenes in New Jersey.

“Straw Purchase Leads to Prison Sentence” – Today’s Pawnbroker 4/9/2012

New Jersey, Georgia
Felon paid his father's girlfriend to buy eight handguns.


Dorothy Johnson-Speight
Mother of gun violence victim Khaaliq Jabbar Johnson and founder of Mothers In Charge, a Philadelphia-based violence-prevention organization

“The woman who bought the gun that killed my son is as responsible as the shooter. It was as if she pulled the trigger herself. Her man, the shooter, could not have walked into that store and purchased a gun because of his lengthy criminal history. The blood of my beautiful first born, my only son, is on her hands. The awful pain and grief I live with every day is because of her decision to purchase that gun.”

APPENDIX 1: CASES
New York, Pennsylvania

Ex-con recruited two mothers of young children to straw buy guns in Pennsylvania. Another felon, a New York drug dealer, used his sister and girlfriend as straw buyers in Pennsylvania. The guns ended up in New York.


Pennsylvania

Convicted robber’s baby mamma bought guns for him.

“Woman charged with ‘straw’ gun purchases” – Philadelphia Inquirer 7/15/2008

Ohio, Minnesota, Washington, DC, New York, North Carolina, New Jersey, Maryland

Wife of former Columbus, Ohio cop-turned-gunrunner straw purchased 168 guns.


Pennsylvania

Convicted felon used baby momma to straw buy guns. “Many straw purchases are committed by the girlfriends of convicts.”

South Carolina, Massachusetts

A gang leader, high-volume gun trafficker used sisters and mother to buy 21 handguns.


Minnesota

Woman arrested for buying guns for her boyfriend, a gang leader who feds say used them in a series of violent crimes, including an assault on a McDonald’s employee, a shooting at a gas station, car theft, robberies and more.

“Feds say woman bought guns for Twin Cities crime spree” – Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune 7/28/15

Pennsylvania

A 22-year-old Pennsylvania woman bought two handguns for her boyfriend who had a felony record. She faces a five-year mandatory minimum sentence.

“Chester woman convicted in straw purchase case” – Delaware County Daily Times 8/27/14

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS

Girlfriends of traffickers are drawn into a life of crime through force, pressure and manipulation. Sometimes the coercion is explicit – “Do this if you know what’s good for you.” Sometimes it’s implied – the gun itself is a threat. Sometimes the coercion is emotional – “You would do this for me if you loved me.”

Florida, Massachusetts

Fiancée of former New England Patriot Aaron Hernandez paid for a $15,000 shipment of guns from Florida to Massachusetts.

U.S. Attorney Office news release 5/5/2015

APPENDIX 1: CASES

Mary Doe
Former straw purchaser, Boston

“If I knew then what I know now, I would’ve made different choices. I’m going back to warn my daughters and their friends because I’m not giving up on my community.”
West Virginia
Female high school math teacher bought gun for felon.

“Suspended WV teacher pleads guilty to making straw purchase of gun for convicted felon” – Daily Journal 7/2/2015

Washington, DC, Virginia
Felon gave female friend $1,000 to buy assault rifle and assault pistol.

“She didn’t know a handgun from a shotgun when questioned by police.”

New York
Female college-bound valedictorian prep school student distributed guns for boyfriend, member of violent street gang. He instructed her on how to shoot, saying “head shots only.”

“Criminal or celebrity? Critics say Afrika’s being glamorized, but church and mom defend her” – New York Daily News 4/27/2011

Maine, Massachusetts
Mother of three young children bought guns for man with criminal history she met through online dating.

“Alton woman sentenced to 18 months for trying to buy guns for three felons” – Bangor Daily News 7/7/2009

Wisconsin
Police stakeout thwarts straw purchase by felon’s girlfriend. She didn’t know a handgun from a shotgun when questioned by police.

“Police stake out gun store on lookout for felons, straw buyers” – Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 9/26/2009

HIGH-VOLUME TRANSACTIONS
One woman is capable of putting hundreds of guns in the wrong hands in just a few transactions.

California, Oregon
Woman bought 35 guns for crack dealer; several of the guns were found at Oakland crime scenes.

“Guns illegally purchased in Oregon turn up at Oakland crime scenes” – Contra Costa Times 10/3/2014

Ohio
Three women, one of whom was pregnant, bought 50 guns for boyfriends and other acquaintances. Gun traffickers often rely on girlfriends to buy them.

“They stand by their gunmen: Those who traffic in illegal weapons often rely on girlfriends to buy them” – Cincinnati Inquirer 2/16/2008

New York, North Carolina, South Carolina
Gunrunner’s girlfriend hid assault weapons in her zebra-striped suitcase, part of the largest gun bust in NYC history.

“NYPD announces 250 illegal firearms seized, 19 arrested in gun ring that stretched into South” – New York Daily News 8/20/2013

New York, Ohio
Gunrunner used three women as straw purchasers of 250 guns. One girlfriend bought 87 guns in single transaction. Gun was used in career-ending shooting of rising basketball star in case of mistaken identity.

“Gun trafficker’s scheme shoots down a young athlete’s dream” – Buffalo News 6/12/2005
WOMEN AND CRIME GUNS: STORIES LIFTED FROM THE HEADLINES
OPERATION LIPSTICK CRIME REPORT

Ohio
Female college student who made Dean’s List arrested as straw purchaser: “I knew nothing about buying guns, but I was buying them in large quantities.”

“The dangers of lying and buying” – WKYC-TV Cincinnati 5/17/13

Pennsylvania
Woman indicted for allegedly buying ten guns over a five-day span and giving them to a convicted felon.

U.S. District Court indictment 9/16/2014: Reading woman bought guns for convicted felon

GUN TRAFFICKING RINGS
Trafficking rings often rely on women straw purchasers to stockpile firearms and avoid detection. These women travel to multiple stores, straw purchasing several guns at a time.

New York, Florida
Female ringleader and two additional women were among the gunrunners who bought 70 guns at Florida gun shows and smuggled them into NYC on Chinatown buses.

“All alleged Florida-to-Chinatown gun smuggling ring broken by police” – WABC-TV New York 11/24/2014

Massachusetts, Georgia
Women straw purchased 18 handguns in two-month spree. The guns turned up on Boston streets.

“Feds, Boston cops team up to get illegal guns off streets” – Dorchester News 1/5/2011

New Jersey, Pennsylvania
Probationer recruited two ex-girlfriends as part of straw purchasing ring that amassed 51 guns.

“Allentown man pleads guilty to orchestrating gun scam” - Patriot News 4/7/2011

Pennsylvania
Six women arrested as part of gun trafficking ring. Police recovered 51 guns. Former Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham: “We have seen the same revolting picture over and over again, which is that women have been providing guns for their drug suppliers, their boyfriends, their former boyfriends, the father of their children,” Abraham said. “They are incapable of lawfully purchasing guns anywhere, and so the women do it for them.”

“Straw-purchase probe leads to arrests” – Philadelphia Inquirer 8/17/2007

Alabama, Massachusetts
Two women made multiple road trips to buy guns in Alabama and transport them to Massachusetts for resale on Boston streets.

“Two Boston women arrested for gun smuggling” - Boston Globe 1/18/2006

Virginia, New York, Maryland
New York City gunrunner recruited women including welfare mothers and college students to buy guns for him in Virginia. The guns were recovered at crime scenes in New York City, Baltimore and Syracuse. Told she was being charged with lying on gun purchase forms, one woman said, “Is that all?”

“Federal agents trace guns to Virginia buyers” – Virginian-Pilot 1/29/2003

APPENDIX 1: CASES
VIGILANT GUN DEALERS

Women straw purchasers are often unable to answer questions about the guns they are buying. Their lack of familiarity with guns is a red flag for gun store owners and employees.

Indiana

Convicted methamphetamine dealer paid his girlfriend’s rent in exchange for her help buying guns. On her second trip back to the gun store, employees denied the sale and alerted police.

“ATF raid near South Bend yields federal gun charges” – South Bend Tribune 7/23/2015

Georgia, California

Gun store employees alerted ATF to trafficker who used pregnant girlfriend and her wheelchair-bound father to move 125 guns from Atlanta to Oakland and San Francisco.

“Follow the guns: From Georgia to Bay Area streets” – Contra Costa Times 7/27/2012

Illinois, Mississippi

Illinois gun dealer alerted ATF after boyfriend-girlfriend team tried to buy assault weapon. Wife of felon bought gun recovered outside President-elect Barack Obama’s Chicago home. Female college student earned $100 to buy guns for felons. “Women make up nearly one-fourth of the people who bought guns recovered in crimes in Chicago.”

“Straw purchasers help convicts get around the law and get armed” – Chicago Sun Times 8/28/2012

Minnesota

South Minneapolis gun store owner shuts down straw purchases: “We hand him the federal form, and he will hand it to his girlfriend or wife. That’s a clear violation.”

“Straw’ gun buyers leave a bloody trail; Experts say “gray market” supplies 90 percent of guns used in crimes” – Minneapolis Star Tribune 4/23/2010

Pennsylvania

Tip from gun store owner led to arrests of three women straw purchasers who supplied guns used in carjackings, shootouts with police, robberies of fast food restaurants and banks and a hit on a grand jury witness.

“Straw buyers obtain weapons used to rob banks” – Philadelphia Inquirer 2/9/2006

Maryland

Man with criminal record for assault recruited a woman to buy a handgun for him after his attempt to purchase guns had failed. He gave the money to the woman and she completed the sale. Shortly after the transaction, the gun dealer became suspicious and notified police.

“Man with previous convictions guilty in straw purchase of gun” – Baltimore Sun 8/3/2001
MEXICAN DRUG CARTELS

Mexican drug cartels are increasingly turning to American women to straw purchase weapons in the U.S. and even run them across the border. Some women may feel pressured into making the purchases. For others, it’s about money.

Texas

Woman who “couldn’t resist the promise of easy money for precious little work” funneled 77 guns to drug cartels. At least a dozen women in the past two years have surfaced in federal gun-trafficking cases in the border region, according to court records. Women are paid as little as $100 per trip.

“Gun traffickers recruiting women as buyers” – USA Today 8/23/2009

Texas

Texas woman heading to the Mexican border was caught with 20 AR15s, 200 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition and several bullet proof vests. She had her nine-year-old son with her in the car.

“Women gunrunners supply Mexico cartels” – KTVK-TV Arizona 3/9/2015

PAID IN DRUGS

Crime guns and drugs go hand-in-hand. Women with substance abuse issues, low self-esteem and cash-flow problems are especially vulnerable to traffickers.

Pennsylvania

Working mother of two straw purchased guns for Percocet and diapers.

“Woman gets 5-10 years in prison for straw gun purchase” – Delaware County Daily Times 1/9/2015

Pennsylvania, New Jersey

Women bought guns for New Jersey drug dealer in exchange for heroin.

“Trio bought guns illegally for Trenton drug dealer” – Bucks County Courier Times 1/16/2015

New York, Pennsylvania

Convicted felon recruited three women to buy guns for him in exchange for cocaine and cash. The guns were used in drug-related crimes in Buffalo.

“Bradford woman gets year in prison for buying guns for felon” – Buffalo News 1/10/2014
Pennsylvania
She had a drug problem and an empty wallet, so when her neighbor asked her to buy a gun, she agreed. The guns she bought were used to kill a teenager, attempt to kill two police officers and deal drugs. Women represent a quarter of straw buyers arrested in Philadelphia.

“Hands that hand a gun to a killer” – Philadelphia Inquirer 11/2/2009

Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington, DC
Young girl began transporting crime guns at age 12. By the time she turned 21, she was supplying large numbers of guns for multiple felons. Payment was in drugs and cash. She did so many deals, she says she lost track. “Countless times–there isn’t a number.” Washington, DC-based ATF veteran: “It’s hard to figure how [women] get manipulated into buying a gun for a person who is not a good person. Even when they get paid, they’re not getting paid a lot -- like $20 or $50. I’ve had women tell me, ‘He just asked me to do it.’ The way they see it is, if a friend asks you to do something for them, why wouldn’t you do it?”

“Angels of Death” – Contently.org 8/1/2014

LIPSTICK has created a searchable database of reports of women straw purchasers on our web site at www.operationlipstick.org. We monitor news reports of women straw purchasers and update the database regularly. Please visit our site to view the most recent cases of women straw buyers reported in the news.

To learn more about women and straw purchasing, please contact LIPSTICK:
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APPENDIX 2: ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Published academic research papers indicate women enable gun traffickers as straw purchasers. A University of California study shows women are disproportionately involved in the purchase of guns used in crime.¹ A U.S. Dept. of Justice study found that a handgun purchased by a female is 50% more likely to be used in crime than a gun purchased by a male.² A Wisconsin study found that a majority of guns purchased and quickly used in crimes were purchased by minority women.³