

■ **selective disinhibition** A loss of self-control due either to the social setting or to drugs or alcohol, or a combination of both.

firearms in homicide. In examining the relationship between guns and homicide, it is important to differentiate between instrumentality and availability. *Instrumentality* refers to the fact that the type of weapon used in a particular encounter has an effect on whether the encounter ends in death. For example, the involvement of a gun may mean the difference between a criminal event ending as an assault or a homicide. When guns are used in robberies, the fatality rate is “three times as high as for robberies with knives and 10 times as high as for robberies with other weapons.”²⁷

Availability refers to issues surrounding how access to guns may increase their presence in all types of interactions, including criminal ones.²⁸ The ease of availability is important, given the relative spontaneity of some violent encounters. The availability of guns is important at the individual level as well as the community level because the greater the presence of guns in a particular neighborhood, the easier the access for individuals beyond their immediate households. Compared to gun instrumentality, then, gun availability may be a much stronger factor in explaining lethal violence.²⁹ See **Library Extra 10-3** for more information.

Alcohol and Drug Use

An important conceptual typology detailing the relationship between alcohol or drugs and crime was developed by Paul J. Goldstein in an article first published in 1985.³⁰ According to Goldstein, the association of alcohol and illicit drugs with violent offending generally takes one of three forms: psychopharmacological use, economic compulsion, and systemic violence. Drugs may be linked to violent offending through *psychopharmacological use*, whereby infrequent or chronic use of certain drugs produces

violent behavior by lowering inhibitions or elevating aggressive tendencies; however, not all drugs produce such effects, and the relationship appears to hold only for people with certain types of personalities using certain substances in certain settings.

When crimes are committed to support a drug habit, Goldstein said that the concept of *economic compulsion* best describes the relationship between crime and drug use. He used the idea of *systemic violence* to describe the connection between drugs and trafficking, and it can take several forms, ranging from rival drug wars to robberies of drug dealers. Although distinct types of relationships between drugs and violence can be described, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive, with one or more relationships present in a single criminal incident.

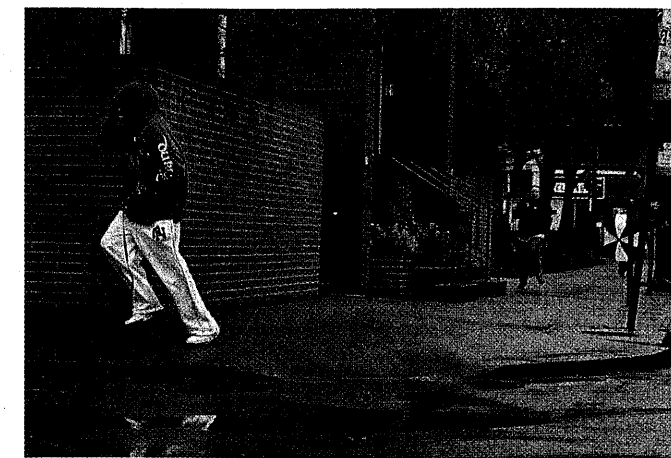
Researchers from the Drug Relationships in Murder Project (DREIM), which analyzed incarcerated homicide offenders in New York State, found that in the majority of homicide cases involving both alcohol and illicit drugs, the primary basis for the connection with the crime was psychopharmacological.³¹

One theoretical approach focused on explaining the role that alcohol plays in homicide as social in nature rather than biochemical is **selective disinhibition**, advanced by Robert Nash Parker and others.³² In particular situations or interactions, the “disinhibiting” effect of alcohol may operate to suspend certain factors that could restrain the occurrence of violence and may operate to put into play certain factors that could increase the occurrence or degree of violence. This perspective relies on the existence of norms operating both to prohibit and to proscribe the use of violence in particular situations. Because alcohol can reduce both

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forms of constraint, “the selective nature of alcohol-related homicide is dependent on the interaction of an impaired rationality and the nature of the social situation.”³³ Parker and his colleagues tested this model by analyzing data on homicides in several cities in 1980, in several cities between 1960 and

1980, and in several states from 1976 to 1983. One key finding from this research was the ability of alcohol to significantly predict primary homicide. In relationships between individuals who are known to each other, alcohol may operate to disinhibit restraints against violence, but the norms that operate to govern interactions between strangers are more rigid in terms of the type of conduct that is proscribed. The use of violence against those known to us is treated with greater tolerance—tolerance that can be increased even more in the presence of alcohol.³⁴



Elizabeth Robertson/The Inquirer/Newscom

A purse snatcher (green jacket) running off with his loot. Why do victimologists suggest that some people contribute to their own victimization?