

# Capitol Hill Mass Murder Case

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In the early morning of March 25, 2006, 28-year-old Kyle Huff shot eight young men and women, six of them fatally, at a rave after-party on East Republican Street in the Capitol Hill section of Seattle. The gunman, a transplant from Montana, then committed suicide just as the police arrived on the scene. Because of the perpetrator's suicide, there was no need for a detailed investigation leading to prosecution. Though closed in a legal sense, the bewildering case was not solved or fully understood. And yet, many members of the Seattle community desired answers to the many perplexing questions that lingered regarding the gunman's motives, method, and state of mind. This article reports the findings of a special panel convened by the Seattle police chief to try to answer some of the questions. We discuss the community response to the crisis and trauma experienced by the survivors and family members; precipitants and warning signs of mass murder; influence of raves, ravers, and Ecstasy; posttraumatic stress disorder; and the Harborview Medical Center Child Traumatic Stress Program. [*Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention* 7:127–150 (2007)]

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## Background

On Saturday, March 25, 2006, the city of Seattle experienced one of its worst mass murders ever, when 28-year-old Kyle Aaron Huff (also known as Aaron Kyle Huff) fatally shot six victims—four males and two females, ranging in age from

14 to 32—and seriously wounded two others in a brief but bloody shooting spree on Seattle's Capitol Hill before killing himself with a single gunshot to the head. Although an earlier multiple murder (the 1983 Wah Mee Club massacre in Chinatown) may have claimed more lives, the nature of Huff's victims and the apparent lack of motive or any preexisting connection between the victims and the assailant provoked profound horror, outrage, grief, anger, and shock throughout the Puget Sound region.

Because the assailant committed suicide, eliminating any need for criminal prosecution (unless he had had accomplices in a conspiracy), there was little reason for much more than a

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cursory investigation into the nature and scope of the shooting spree. In the days following the episode, the police learned much about the events (because there were more than a dozen witnesses to the shooting), but surprisingly little about the assailant—except that he was an unemployed loner who was relatively new to the area and resided in virtual obscurity with his identical twin brother in an apartment in the Northgate section of the city.

In a legal sense, once any culpability beyond Kyle Huff was ruled out, the case was closed. Yet, for many who were connected intimately or indirectly to the tragedy, the case was far from solved. Unresolved were such questions as

- Why did Kyle Huff commit the act?
- Was Huff mentally impaired, and could the rampage have been anticipated and prevented?
- Why did Huff commit the crime where he did, given no apparent prior relationship to the victims?
- Was the episode totally random in scope, or did Huff somehow target the victims?
- Was the murder spree to any extent premeditated, or was there something that occurred during the evening that precipitated Huff's rage?

For the healing process to proceed, it was important to make some sense of the seemingly senseless carnage, to derive answers or at least plausible theories about these and other questions surrounding motive, causation, prevention, and response. Because there were, of course, many other cases to occupy the detectives in the homicide unit and because the phenomenon of mass murder (as distinct from more routine homicides motivated by profit or interpersonal conflict) is rather unfamiliar even to experienced police investigators, Chief Gil Kerlikowske of the Seattle Police Department (SPD) decided to recruit a special panel to undertake an in-depth analysis of the crime and

the perpetrator. This article is the result of the panel's investigation.

## Methods

One of us (Fox) visited the crime scene and other important locations, met with police, and reviewed the evidence gathered by several detectives in the homicide unit. Fox also met with a number of witnesses to the shootings and other individuals who had information pertinent to the events surrounding the massacre. In addition, he ventured to Whitefish and Kalispell, Montana, the community in which the assailant was raised and spent most of his life (except for the few years in Seattle). Fox talked with Huff's family, friends, and co-workers, as well as the police and school officials.

It is both interesting and important to note the rather different response from residents of Seattle and those in Montana. Very few in Seattle knew Kyle Huff, except those who met him casually through his sporadic employment, in his apartment complex, or at various bars and clubs that he frequented. To Seattleans, for the most part, Kyle Huff was almost exclusively defined by his horrible act of March 25. For so many in Seattle, the big questions were what kind of person could have carried out such a senseless crime and why.

In Montana, by contrast, the Seattle Capitol Hill shooting is, in a sense, far more distant than the hundreds of miles that separate the two communities; it is a different world and, more importantly, a different side to Kyle Huff. The consensus view around Huff's hometown is that the shooting was completely uncharacteristic of him. They would prefer to move on without a full understanding of the crime; they would rather focus on the Kyle Huff they knew, the man they cared for who left for Seattle in January 2006 never to return.

Understandably, many people—witnesses and others with relevant information—were reticent to talk, either because they did not want to revisit painful experiences or out of concern for being blamed, if not sued, for their role in the tragic outcome. After initial guardedness or defensiveness, most, however, did eventually decide to speak openly about what they knew or had observed.

Finally, Dr. Fox worked collaboratively with the other members of the panel in discussing evidence, interpretations, and ideas. Several meetings and countless telephone conversations and e-mail exchanges were extremely helpful in finalizing this panel report.

## The Setting

### *2112 East Republican*

The bluish-gray, aluminum-sided house with a nothing-sized yard that stands at 2112 East Republican Street was well known in and around Seattle's Capitol Hill section of Seattle, even before it became infamous. Its 20-something-year-old residents—Ian Gill, Jesiah Martin, Jeremy Martin, Anthony Moulton, and Marc Verebely—plus their 32-year-old “house mother” Sorellio Saterne (aka April Dorsey) were familiar faces at techno-music parties and coffee houses from Capitol Hill to Ballard.

It was more than just the music and performance activities of the residents (some of whom were nicknamed “The Clowns” for the way they liked to dress and act at various parties) that were well known around town; the residence itself was a frequent party spot for a young crowd, as young as the early teens. Even though they may never have reported their concerns to the police, some neighbors were fed up with the noise, the youthful (and sometimes drug inspired) antics, and the stream of cars that often clogged the street and blocked

driveways. Yet few in the neighborhood believed there was any reason for alarm, viewing the house as a safe haven for kids—street-wise drifters and suburbanites alike—to crash after late night raves and other events.

The final East Republican party would have a lasting impression on the lives of many people, near and far. Typical of the “after hours” rave timetable, the fateful night began late on Friday evening, March 24. House resident Jesiah Martin was enlisted to “do sound” for a rave party, with a zombie-oriented theme of “Better Off Undead” to be held at the Shack, part of the multipurpose Seattle Capitol Hill Arts Center on 12th Avenue. The other house members (except for Sorellio, who was too tired to join her friends and stayed elsewhere that entire evening) and several of their friends went along to the rave, which was open to both adults and teens.

The rave had originally been scheduled for Studio Seven on South Wharton Street, but was moved at the last minute to the Shack. Security at the event was quite sufficient to handle the crowd of several hundred. And if any problems were to arise, the East Precinct SPD station was just a block away, and the police vehicle lot was virtually across the street. Still, other than illicit drug use (primarily Ecstasy), raves were generally not known for rowdiness or violence, despite impressions by some to the contrary. The Shack served alcohol to those with proper ID, but the bar closed a bit early that night for lack of demand within the predominantly young crowd of ravers.

The event drew a diverse crowd, including core members of the local rave community, weekend ravers from various places around the area, plus a few interlopers. Most dressed in costume for the zombie theme and wore fake blood; most lost themselves and their inhibitions in the loud, thumping electronic music spun by the DJs and the communal atmosphere.

Part of the evening plan for the East Republican boys was to invite as many people as possible to

an after-party back at their house. By virtue of the disconnect between the closing time of rave events (4:00 a.m., after which heightened insurance-related costs would apply) and the 7:00 a.m. start time of weekend bus service (a change from 24-hr service available years ago before budget cuts), it was commonplace for ravers to seek out after-parties to spend the hours until they could secure public or private transportation home or to wait out the Ecstasy crash.

But the guys from East Republican were particularly eager to have a good turnout on that particular morning. A week earlier, they had staged a party at a warehouse down the street from the Shack, an event that was closed down by the police because of inadequate licensing. During the bust, the police had confiscated the hundreds of dollars in entrance fees and the unopened kegs of beer. So Moulton and his housemates decided to invite people over to use up the opened kegs before the beer went flat and recoup some money by requesting donations at the door.

Among the hundreds enjoying the music, freestyle dancing, and uninhibited atmosphere at the "Better Off Undead" rave, one person made an impression if only by his lack of participation. For reasons that went beyond his 6'5" stature, Kyle Huff stood out from the crowd. He looked, dressed, acted, and talked differently from everyone else. Huff was "sketchy," as Moulton told the police, meaning that he did not fit in, and he gave off "bad vibes." Nevertheless, he seemed to be someone who might welcome somewhere to go afterward, and perhaps appreciate a more intimate environment, so he was invited to the after-party.

A change of scenery really made no difference at all to Huff's demeanor. He did not fit in any better at the East Republican after-party than he had at the rave. Several in attendance attempted to make small talk and engage him in conversation, but no one connected to the stranger who seemed content, or at least comfortable, standing off by himself.

## **NOW**

At dawn, the after-party was beginning to wind down. The crowd that had at one point been as large as 50 or more was dwindling fast. Those who were not asleep on the couches, beds, or the floor were preparing to leave. Kyle Huff left too, although no one noticed his departure.

Evidence suggests that Huff left the after-party shortly before 7:00 a.m. and walked to his truck that was parked around the block. He gathered weapons and ammunition from the black Dodge pickup, leaving additional weaponry and ammunition behind. Walking back through the quiet neighborhood, he paused three times to spray paint the word "NOW" on the sidewalk. His announcement may have derived from a frequent "now, now, now, now" refrain in the song "I Want To Know Now," by Nirvana, a Seattle-based alternative-rock group, which was one of his favorites.

Huff returned to the 2112 East Republican address armed with a Winchester Defender pump action 12-gauge shotgun and a Ruger P-94 handgun and wearing two bandoliers full of shotgun ammunition. He also wore a holster on his right side along with a holder for two extra ammunition magazines for the handgun. On his left side, Huff carried a tactical ammunition pouch filled with AR-15 ammunition, even though he had left the AR-15 rifle inside his truck.

Approaching the front porch, Huff shot victims Christopher Williamson and Melissa Moore with both weapons. He also shot Jeremy Martin in the chest, but Martin managed to fall through the front doorway screaming, "I've been shot." Witnesses recalled seeing smoke raise from gunshot holes in his chest, injuries so severe that Martin died hours later at Harborview Medical Center.

Inside the house, Marc Verebely and others tried to push shut and bar the front door from the gunman. The door's path, however, was blocked by the legs of Melissa Moore's lifeless

body. Huff then shoved open the door, sending Marc Verebely backward onto the couch. Huff calmly stepped over the bodies and through the doorway into the crowded living room. While survivors Tristiana Vincent and Jessica Ritland hid behind the couch, the assailant fatally shot Justin Schwartz, Jason Travers, and Suzanne Thorne. Huff also shot two others, both of whom survived. Huff aimed his gun squarely at Verebely, twice pulling the trigger, but the gun dry-fired and failed.

With people screaming and running frantically through the back door in the kitchen, Huff proceeded deliberately upstairs announcing "I've got enough ammunition for everyone." At the top of the steps, the gunman shot twice through the locked bathroom door, putting two large holes in the wooden door. Gary Will and Alissa Dunn, who had been chatting about their relationship while she reapplied her makeup when the shooting erupted, hid in the corner far away from the door. Huff moved on without pursuing the couple inside.

Huff discarded one of his bandoliers in the upstairs hallway and then returned downstairs and walked toward the first-floor back bedrooms. Huff peered into the rooms and likely saw Chavon Howe hiding behind a couch in Jesiah's bedroom and Erin Katchuk sleeping in Jeremy's bedroom across the hall. For some reason, Huff chose not to pursue them either.

The gunman then proceeded down the basement stairs, although he did not fire his weapons. He could have easily located others, including Anthony Moulton, Johnny Dixon, Syid Fudedin, and Oliver Bragg, hiding behind furniture and divider walls. It was as if he had lost interest in shooting any more, or it was just too much effort. It may be that whatever satisfaction he had hoped to derive from the shooting spree was not forthcoming or had been satiated.

Huff stepped back through the front door toward the sidewalk. It is unclear what his next

move would have been if he had not encountered a police officer when he got outside. He had the AR-15 assault weapon back in his truck, as well as plastic ties often used by police to cuff suspects. He also had two cans of gasoline that could have served either for arson or for a getaway, if they were in fact at all part of his plan of attack.

### ***Responding to the Community Crisis Call***

Around 7:03 a.m. on March 25, dispatchers began receiving a stream of calls with reports of several shots being fired at 2112 East Republican Street. The 911 emergency switchboard received no fewer than 17 calls from an assortment of neighbors as well as from several people inside the house who whispered for help using their cell phones.

Officer Steve Leonard, a veteran of the SPD with prior experience in responding to episodes of multiple shooting, was first to arrive on the scene, at approximately 7:05 a.m. Officer Leonard had been patrolling near the area and had actually heard the gunfire. Receiving a call from dispatch about the shootings, he arrived moments after the massacre started.

Officer Leonard first saw a wounded victim stumble out of the west side of the house and fall in front of the driveway. At the same time, Kyle Huff approached Leonard, who immediately ordered the gunman to drop his weapon. Before Leonard's command was even finished, Kyle opened his mouth, inserted his shotgun (his long arms permitting what for others might be impossible), and, without hesitation, pulled the trigger.

Leonard and other officers who responded to the call found six bodies (two female victims, three male victims, and the suspect) located within the crime scene. Kyle Huff's body lay on his back on the cement pathway to the front-porch steps and just a few feet from the top of the cement steps to the street. He was

dressed in a dark long-sleeved sweatshirt, tan pants, and black combat style boots. He still had one bandolier with six shotgun rounds in it.

The bodies of victims 1 and 2 lay outside the house, while victims 3, 4, and 5 were discovered inside the residence. The sixth victim died at the hospital.

- Victim 1: 21-year-old Christopher M. Williamson (Caucasian/male, DOB November 27, 1984) died from gunshot wounds to the chest and head.
- Victim 2: 14-year-old Melissa L. Moore (Asian/female, DOB June 4, 1991) died from a gunshot wound to her chest and a gunshot wound to her head.
- Victim 3: 22-year-old Justin Schwartz (Alaska Native/male, DOB April 28, 1983) died from a shotgun wound to his torso and a gunshot wound to his neck.
- Victim 4: 32-year-old Jason Travers (Caucasian/male, DOB July 22, 1973) died from a gunshot wound to the head.
- Victim 5: 15-year-old Suzanne M. Thorne (Caucasian/female, DOB June 1, 1990) died from a gunshot wound to the head.
- Victim 6: 26-year-old Jeremy R. Martin (Caucasian/male, DOB October 22, 1979) was transferred to Harborview Medical Center where he later died from a gunshot wound to his chest.
- Two other gunshot victims (names withheld) survived their injuries.

In addition to the bodies of those shot in the assault, the police rounded up several frightened yet unharmed men and women from various hiding spaces, in closets and behind furniture. One survivor slept through the entire ordeal and was awoken by rescuers with news of what had transpired. Of immediate concern was to assist the wounded, identify the dead, and escort the others out of the house and to the police station to take their statements.

Detectives recovered eight fired shotgun shells and five fired handgun casings, suggesting that Huff fired his shotgun at least eight times, not including his final shot, and his handgun at least five times. Unfired ammunition (both shotgun shells and cartridges) was found throughout the scene.

### Responding to Crisis and Tragedy

The process of recovery and investigation would take weeks, if not months. Although survivors and families were generally appreciative of the treatment and support from the police investigators and the victim/witness staff, issues and concerns did surface that should be examined.

The immediate aftermath of the East Republican Street shooting was chaotic. Survivors were escorted through the front door of the house, past bodies of their friends and that of the assailant, even though evacuation through the back door may have been less traumatic.

Those survivors not needing extensive medical treatment were transported to the police headquarters for questioning. The police brought in a crew of paramedics, clothing for those needing it, and large quantities of food and water. A better response plan may have included seeking a Seattle hotel to serve as a temporary and more comfortable shelter for survivors and their families to rest and recount the ordeal.

Families who had learned of the shooting spree through the media arrived on the scene, frantic to determine if their sons or daughters were there and were okay. Other family members did not hear about the massacre for hours, some learning of the episode from friends who had called them, or lived too far away to come down to see for themselves what had happened to their child.

Some families expressed criticism that they were not directly informed by the police of their

child's murder, particularly when a victim's cell phone was programmed with the parent's number. A number of parents indicated that they received too little communication from the SPD. Besides the victim/witness staff, there should be one individual who serves as a point person and ombudsperson for all those affected.

Several family members felt helpless in the immediate aftermath of the shooting in trying to obtain information. Many were frustrated by curt or slow response from medical staff and various local and county offices. Adding insult to injury, they were annoyed by the \$20 fee required by the King County Medical Examiner's Office to obtain an autopsy or a toxicology report. It would seem to be a basic courtesy to waive the fee for families suffering in the aftermath of homicide or suicide, especially one as sadly tragic as this.

It is easy, of course, to play Monday morning quarterback and second-guess operations and decisions made in the immediate and subsequent aftermath of the Capitol Hill massacre. In addition, there is a tendency, especially when the killer is deceased, for surviving victims to vent their anger at others who are trying to be helpful. Nevertheless, a certain degree of self-study may ensure that some useful lessons and perhaps improvements in the process will arise out of the tremendous pain caused by this incident.

## **Kyle Huff**

### ***Huff's Shooting Pattern***

Huff clearly had a plan to commit murder and suicide, but during the course of executing the plan, his firing of the guns showed signs of disorganization, as had become a recent pattern in his life.

Out of work and alone much of the time, Huff had plenty of opportunity to obsess on his grievance and develop a strategy for murder.

He may not have shot as many people as he had anticipated, in light of the amount of unused ammunition, suggesting that the reality of killing perhaps did not match his expectations. The suicide was apparently premeditated because of Huff's quick suicidal response when confronted by police. Obviously, his intent was not to be arrested or killed by police.

Kyle Huff drove his truck to the East Republican neighborhood, equipped with an arsenal of weaponry. Temporarily leaving the party at dawn, he returned to gather up his weapons and ammunition. Huff loaded his Ruger handgun with a magazine and chambered one round. He put the Ruger in his holster on his right side. He placed two magazines for the Ruger in his pocket. He then donned two bandoliers, each with 15 rounds of 12-gauge 00 buck shotgun shells. He then loaded the shotgun with eight rounds, chambering one.

No loose shotgun shells were found in his pockets or his handgun. The shotgun required the use of two hands to pump, fire, and reload. The handgun required two hands to reload and chamber a cartridge. When firing the shotgun, the handgun was holstered. When he was firing the handgun, Huff held the shotgun in his left hand. When he reloaded the handgun, he put the shotgun down. The shotgun was reloaded twice and the handgun reloaded once.

Approaching the house, Huff saw two people (victims 1 and 2) on the porch. First, he pumped the shot, ejected one round from the chamber and inserted a new round (this explains one of the unfired shotgun shells found in front of the house). It is not clear if he did the pump action to alert and scare his victims or to simulate movies and video games. It is also conceivable that he forgot he had chambered a round at the truck or that it was an automatic reaction to the reality of killing people. Throughout the crime scene, there were spent shotgun and .40-caliber casings as well as unfired shotgun shells and .40-caliber cartridges that seem to

indicate that he kept pumping the shotgun and rechambering the handgun.

Reaching the porch, Huff noticed that the victims were still alive. He apparently removed his Ruger from the holster and shot each victim again. Then, he entered the house still holding the Ruger and shot the next victim (victim 3) with his handgun.

Eight rounds were accounted for outside the house and inside the living room. He reloaded the shotgun. Eight rounds for the handgun were also accounted for between the porch and the living room.

Kyle returned the Ruger to his holster, pumped the shotgun, and shot the next victim with the shotgun. He then reloaded the shotgun and dropped the bandolier after reloading.

After searching upstairs, Huff returned to the first floor and subsequently went down to the basement. In the basement, there were two unspent cartridges, indicating that he had pumped the shotgun as he went searching for targets but did not fire.

Three victims died from handgun wounds, two died from shotgun and handgun wounds, and one from a shotgun wound. We have no information on the number or types of wounds of the victims taken to the hospital.

Finally, Huff stopped searching through the house and left through the front door, discarding the handgun with an empty magazine. A second empty magazine was found at the scene and a third loaded magazine was found in his pocket.

We cannot account for more than nine .40-caliber rounds, yet there were two empty magazines, one on the ground and one in the Ruger. There were 17 shotgun shells, fired and accounted for. From this we know that he reloaded at least twice. There were four rounds left in the shotgun, so he did not fully reload the shotgun each time.

Huff walked through the house, repeatedly pumping his gun and discharging casings to the floor. But except for the initial flurry of

gunshots, he did not shoot at anyone. This suggests some degree of disorganization or confusion regarding gun use, anxiety, or failure to follow his plan.

### *Huff's Personal Computer*

The personal computer inside the apartment of Kane and Kyle Huff was retrieved and placed into evidence by the SPD. Although Kyle undoubtedly spent much time on the machine and surfing the Internet during his many hours of unemployed time, his brother Kane and conceivably others who may have visited the apartment would have had access as well. Therefore, with the exception of messages from Kyle Huff's e-mail account, observations about computer activity are suggestive yet cannot be linked to Kyle with certainty.

Kyle Huff was not a sophisticated computer user. He used Windows 98, a soon-to-be unsupported Microsoft PC operating system. He had evidence of using AOL and Hotmail for e-mail. The history of sites he may have visited through Microsoft Internet Explorer was not available, so we were unable to determine his favorite sites or his home page.

From information recovered from the computer, we do know that he (or possibly his brother) surfed the Web for adult, heterosexual pornography, hardly an unusual activity, plus to a minor extent Web sites related to hate groups. Huff had many computer games but only one WWII combat game—Close Combat IV. More importantly, there appeared to be significant Web browsing on sites associated with raves and rave culture.

There were many unallocated clusters found on Huff's computer, representing locations on the hard drive that were previously written and then deleted/overwritten. In these unallocated clusters were found information on methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) or "Ecstasy", skinheads, and serial murders.

The MDMA clusters were complete and continuous which would mean that they had recently been erased. The files included titles related to teen rave girls, drugs, drug quality, the effects and dangers of drug use, and neurotoxicity.

Associated with Windows Media Player were many deleted files preceded by the word "skins." We assume that these were associated with music files of some type.

Also found were folders on games and entertainment. One unallocated cluster referred to Columbine High School (one of the key words searched for by the SPD). Another unallocated cluster was called "Mind Control Coverup." There was also an excerpt of information about a woman on trial for attempted murder of her fiance.

Huff's computer system had two hard drives and both had operating system software. One was infected with viruses. A knowledgeable computer user would have purchased antivirus software to protect the computer. Some of the viruses were of the Trojan horse variety. These viruses can either capture keystrokes and send the information to a given site for identity theft or exploitation or turn the computer into a "spam" site to relay messages to others listed in the computer's address books. Trojan horse viruses typically come from pornography sites. The virus software appears to have hampered computer operation so apparently an additional hard drive was installed instead of antivirus software. This supports the lack of computer sophistication of the user(s).

## Raves and Ravers

The all-night dance parties known as raves became mainstream in the 1980s, as a rebellion against popular music, nightclub culture, and commercial radio. Experts suggest that the roots of rave music are located in England during the "acid house era," when British house

artists experimented with the frequencies of their bass synthesizers. This electronic art form (known as "techno") found its way to the United States in the early 1990s. Since that time, rave music has continued to evolve and separate into a blend of high-energy electronic music and thumping rhythm designed to increase heart rates and adrenaline levels.

Given the youthful crowd, illicit drug use is fairly common at raves, especially the use of Ecstasy (or MDMA). This drug is reported to trigger the release of the hormone serotonin, the effects of which include an extreme elevation of mood, feelings of love and empathy, the urge to hug and kiss others, an increased ability to communicate, and a great amount of energy.

Although certainly not everyone at a rave is on Ecstasy, almost everyone is exceptionally friendly. Ravers are commonly known for trying to promote peace, love, unity, and respect (PLUR). They also support percussive, electronic music and freeform dancing. Fights or scuffles at a rave are rare; the atmosphere itself tends to be welcoming and loving. In many ways, the contemporary rave culture, with its hedonism and alternative forms of music, parallels the hippy culture of the previous generation of youth, but with the notable exception that ravers are essentially apolitical.

As is true of all drugs, Ecstasy has its adverse side effects. One common effect is the tendency to grind one's teeth and jaw and chew on the inside of the mouth. Dehydration is also common. More significant, after "coming down" from a night on Ecstasy, a user can experience depression from the loss of serotonin, a condition that can sometimes last for days. One of the purposes of rave after-parties is to provide a safe landing spot for the post-Ecstasy crash.

In Seattle, believed to be one of the more rave-active parts of the country, raves have become increasingly popular among teens as clubs and bars in the city are for a 21 and over

clientele. Unlike other cities, there are few 18 and over nightclubs or places to enable teens to party with people of legal drinking age. This has encouraged many production companies and venues to hold all-ages raves with no alcohol (or limited access to alcohol).

Unlike those in some other areas, Seattle rave producers do not hesitate to advertise their events. They distribute fliers at malls and on cars and even use Ticketmaster and similar online services as their box office. Many of the raves are themed and offer discounts if one wears a costume, thereby encouraging young teens to join in the fun. Security guards are stationed at the entrance and must abide by the laws to keep venues from getting shut down. For this reason, dealing of drugs is kept inside the rave and out of sight. Drugs are given special code names or described by their color. For many teens, raves serve as a family where they feel accepted and loved by all, even strangers. Often with the assistance of Ecstasy, teens feel confident and secure, as though they fit in and are safe.

The rave held at the Shack on 12th Avenue in Capitol Hill and attended by Kyle Huff on the evening of Friday, March 24, 2006, and into the early morning hours of Saturday, March 25, was a zombie-themed party, with its title, "Better Off Undead." The flyer read "Come to our zombie/undead creature appreciation dance and please leave your drugs, alcohol and weapons at home. Please come in undead attire." The attendees wore zombie style makeup. Red coloring was used to simulate blood, and white face paint was used to create a ghost-like appearance.

One of the most important objectives of this behavioral analysis was to determine the extent to which Kyle Huff specifically targeted the rave community and the East Republican group in particular. From talking with survivors at a memorial service held at the Capitol Hill Arts Center, many would prefer to believe that the shooting spree was completely random, an un-

fortunate turn of fate for a group of kids who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Some believed, or at least wanted to believe, that the rampage could just have likely occurred at a shopping mall or a supermarket, or any venue where people gather.

There are some cases of mass murderers whose paranoid view of the world is so distorted that they wage war on society, gunning down whomever happens to be in their path. Although this notion of a mass killer going berserk and killing indiscriminately may fit many people's stereotype, the instances are rather few in number. Instead, most mass shootings are methodically planned and carefully aimed at a specific target for specific reasons.

Most commonly, mass killers target those whom they hold responsible for their miserable existence and a life no longer worth living. Typically, family members and coworkers fall victim to this type of massacre. In addition, there are many mass shooters who may not seek out particular individuals but target a group or class of people to punish. Over the years, America has witnessed cases of gunmen targeting Southeast Asians, women, school jocks, minorities—whomever they perceive as the enemy.

The early indications surrounding the Seattle Capitol Hill shooting pointed toward a targeted episode against a particular group—in this case, ravers. Had his rampage been truly indiscriminate, it is doubtful that the assailant would have armed himself for a bloodbath but wait hour upon hour to act. Indeed, there would have been many other targets, more readily available, were he so inclined.

Many key pieces of evidence, both eyewitness statements and various documents, suggest that Kyle Huff had been stalking the rave community and planning his assault for some period of time, at least for weeks. In fact, one woman claimed to have attended a rave with Huff during which he talked about wanting to blow up the rave. This tip, however, could not be

substantiated as the woman insisted on hiding behind the anonymity of e-mail.

It is likely that Huff would have initially investigated raves with the purpose of developing a friendship network. New to the area with his entire group of friends back in Montana, the rave community offered both music (which was just about his only passion) plus the opportunity to join a community known to be welcoming to all. At some juncture, however, he would have felt rejected by the rave community, even though his sense of rejection may have stemmed more from his own inability to fit in than the ravers' unwillingness to include him.

As early as the beginning of February, he was seen by several employees at Studio Seven in downtown Seattle sitting in his truck watching as people arrived for the Robogirl rave. He sought information online as to upcoming rave events and browsed Web sites about raves and the lifestyle of ravers. Then, on March 23, he wrote a suicide letter to his brother explaining the motive for his soon-to-be-launched attack—specifically, defending society from the promiscuous rave culture that he perceived as dangerous and evil.

On the eve of the shooting, Huff was first seen at Studio Seven, again in his truck waiting and watching, before being chased off by security. Once at the Shack rave, he stood off to the side, watching and possibly thinking about his plan. Later that morning, he was seen by a rave promoter and a companion in a small room off to the side. Huff reportedly glared at the couple for several moments as the witness rested his head on the girl's lap. Huff reportedly said nothing but stared in a manner that was characterized as profoundly menacing.

Regardless of the timetable, there is much evidence counterindicative to the idea that the massacre was a sudden eruption of rage. In addition, some have speculated that Huff's rampage may have involved an adverse reaction

to drugs that he ingested unwittingly or voluntarily, but this would not explain the suicide letter and other indications that he hunted ravers.

Over the past few months, as more was learned about Huff's background, characteristics, personality, and lifestyle, it became increasingly clear that there was much about the rave culture that would likely have irritated him. For example, a man like Huff, known by friends not to be particularly affectionate and somewhat uncomfortable with physical contact with acquaintances, would have found the frequent shows of affection among ravers rather off-putting or even phony. Additionally, the cute characters worshipped by ravers, such as "hello kitty" and "care bears," would have likely seemed bizarre to him. More important, Huff would likely feel out of place in a culture where promiscuity and "cuddle puddles" (a group of people lying together on the floor, hugging and massaging each other) are commonplace, especially because his own relationship history was characterized by few girlfriends and no long-term romantic/sexual relationships.

In addition, the rave community in Seattle is generally known for its alternative gender roles—as one person put it, "mean girls and sissy boys." Our observations confirm this. The women tend to be aggressive, assertive, perhaps rebelling against traditional female sex roles. Pink is a statement, not an involuntarily ascribed sign of the "weaker" sex. Many of the men are somewhat passive, particularly in the presence of the women. Several people in fact described the residents of the East Republican house as a group of not-so independent boys watched over by a strong mother figure.

It was not our intention to denigrate alternative lifestyles in any way. It is clearly acceptable for the women and the men to reject traditional gender roles—for the men to seek out emancipated women and the women to pursue SNAGs (sensitive new-age guys). However,

the prevailing status and view of sex and gender roles within the rave community would certainly have been antithetical, if not threatening, to Kyle Huff. Although his perception may have been colored by depression and delusion, he felt that the rave culture was “raping” him.

### The Suicide Letter

On April 24, the SPD Arson/Bomb Squad received a report from the manager of an apartment complex not far from Huff’s former residence about a suspicious-looking package with wires protruding from it. Although nothing explosive was recovered from the search of the dumpster where the package was located, something quite extraordinary was found. Crumbled inside a fast-food bag were some retail store receipts and a handwritten letter, dated March 23, with the heading “From Kyle to Kane.” The letter had been printed by hand on the reverse side of a memorandum directed to residents of Huff’s apartment complex and also dated March 23, the Thursday before the shooting.

The possibility that the letter was a hoax certainly had to be considered, especially given the oddly serendipitous circumstances in which the note was recovered. Could it be that someone, including Kane Huff or anyone with a copy of the complex-wide memorandum, could have attempted for whatever reason to put words into Kyle Huff’s mouth, blaming the rave community?

Initial inspection of the letter and comparison to handwritten notes found in Kyle Huff’s wallet (particularly a list of names and numbers of family, friends, and coworkers) indicated to the untrained eye a striking degree of similarity. But any firm conclusions would need to await laboratory tests and expert analysis.

Dr. Fox informed Kane Huff about the discovery and offered to show him the letter for his reaction to the authorship and content. Fox explained that it was a private letter, appar-

ently from his brother, and wanted him to have it. The letter said, “I hope you find this letter after the fact. Don’t let the police or FBI keep you from having it, this is my last wish for you to see this.”

After receiving the letter sent by fax, Kane Huff denied any similarity to his brother’s handwriting, claiming that Kyle usually employed script, not printing. This, however, was at odds with our samples of Kyle’s writing as well as with information obtained later from friends of Kyle to whom he had sent letters from Seattle.

Despite the denial of authenticity, Kane Huff was acutely interested in the circumstances surrounding its discovery, clearly suggesting an attempt to defend his brother. In addition, he asked for the letter to be faxed again hoping to secure a better copy, a request that would be unlikely were the letter not genuine.

From the beginning of the police investigation, Kane Huff was rather guarded and suspicious. He tended to defend his brother, even to the point of stretching credibility beyond reasonable limits. The letter was clearly embarrassing to the memory of Kyle, and so it was understandable why Kane would wish to distance himself from it.

Eventually, perhaps when he felt more at ease with the purpose of the panel, Kane conceded that the letter indeed looked like his brother’s handwriting. Kane still denied ever having seen the letter before; if this were a lie, he may have wished for obvious reasons to avoid the perception that he had been aware of his brother’s plan.

On June 7, the Washington State crime laboratory concluded based on visual comparison that there was a high probability the handwriting belonged to Kyle Huff. A more definitive test (electrostatic detection apparatus), based on the amount of pressure applied by the writer to the paper, was not conclusive, largely because of the compromised condition of the

paper (it had been doused with water during the bomb-suspicion response).

How the letter ended up in the dumpster blocks away from the Huff apartment remains an open question. The dumpster was emptied on a weekly basis, and so the letter would have to have been placed in the receptacle just prior to its discovery and weeks after it was written. We learned from several sources that Kane traveled with friends back to Seattle at about that time to vacate his apartment and leave Seattle permanently. Thus, it is likely that the bag with the letter inside would have been discarded during the move. Whether Kane had ever in fact seen the letter before is unknown, but likely unimportant.

The content of the letter was not a surprise to the members of the panel, given our prior hypothesis concerning Kyle Huff's disgust with the rave community. We would have been perplexed had the letter exposed hatred of gays, immigrants, or minorities because nothing in the evidence file or interviews indicated these types of issues.

The evidence file did contain a police record regarding an altercation with an antiracist group of skinheads in 2004 in Seattle. But this appears to have been little more than a barroom, alcohol-inspired scuffle of little significance. Although the Huff computer indicated that he (or Kane) visited Web sites about hate groups, this may, as Kane explained, have occurred in reaction to the episode. No one close to Kyle recalled hostility toward anyone or any groups, nor did they recall any political fervor whatsoever. For the most part, he was unconcerned about politics and current events.

We on the panel had hoped that Huff's letter would have remained private. Had it been a message to the police or to the media, there would be little objection ethically to its release. It was, however, a communication from one private individual to another, and we had hoped to respect that degree of privacy. We planned

to comment on the letter, as an important piece of evidence, but not quote from it.

Regrettably, word about the letter leaked to one news station, and shortly thereafter, there was a demand from the media for its release. Because the Huff case was not active legally, the SPD decided not to resist and complied with the media request.

With its contents made public, we can of course comment quite freely on the substance of the letter. It reflects paranoid thinking of a man with delusions of his important role in saving society, seeing himself as a revolutionary out to protect the world from evil. He felt "raped" by his interactions with ravers. Although the tone of the letter is quite extreme and makes claims that are certainly invalid, there is some connection to reality in his words. In fact, we heard by e-mail and through phone conversations from some critics who see the rave lifestyle as unhealthy for the participants if not more generally for the social fabric. Fortunately, the views of the individuals who volunteered their antirave opinions are not as extreme as Huff's, although Huff's actions provided them much to exploit in advancing their position.

It is not unusual for a mass killer to focus his own disenchantment upon a group of people and suggest that mass murder is the right thing, the noble thing, a duty to squash the enemy. Although there is little about the rave community that would account for Huff's personality deterioration in the months prior to the episode, there is much about it that could have prompted his anger.

### **Music, Video Games, Drugs, and Other External Forces**

It is not uncommon for rumors and unscientific theories to surface in the wake of an act that seems so inexplicable—conjectures concerning the influence of violence in movies, games, or

musical lyrics; the role of alcohol and prescription or recreational drugs; or psychiatric/behavioral disorders resulting from chemicals or even neurological abnormalities. People often seek simple answers even to perplexing questions.

Almost without exception, these explanations are fruitless, as the road to mass murder is typically far more complex. Many early media reports, not to mention on-line blogs, focused on Kyle Huff's choice in music, particularly heavy metal, and lyrics associated with violence as well as violent video games and movies. Although it is quite possible, if not probable, that he found inspiration in a song to inscribe NOW on sidewalks leading to the murder site and "Now kids now" in a suicide letter addressed to his twin brother, this would only have guided the form, but not the inspiration, for mass murder. In addition, although Kyle was known to enjoy horror films and video games, and in his unlimited free time he had lots of occasion to watch or play, there appeared to be no clear causal connection, even with the zombie theme to the rave.

Many of Huff's friends in Montana had hoped for a simple excuse, such as the possibility that drugs were used to spike his drink. Or perhaps there was some clearly identifiable reason (such as a brain tumor) to account for the aberrant and uncharacteristic behavior.

Unfortunately, the self-inflicted gunshot wound prevented any examination of Huff's brain, and Federal/state Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act regulations prevent disclosure of toxicology and other medical information. Still, we saw no compelling reason to embrace those explanations.

### **The Development of a Mass Killer**

Despite the popular appeal of simple and singular explanations for episodic violence, such as brain tumors, contaminants like lead poisoning, and the toxic nature of popular culture, panel

members Fox and Levin have found in their studies of hundreds of mass murderers a consistent constellation of factors that explain the development of the will to kill scores of innocent people. These factors cluster into three types: (a) predisposers (long-term and stable preconditions that become incorporated into the personality of the killer), (b) precipitants (short-term and acute triggers, i.e., catalysts), and (c) facilitators (conditions, usually situational, which increase the likelihood of a violent outburst but are not necessary to produce that response).

### ***Frustration***

The impact of frustration or goal blockage on aggressive behavior has been well documented in the literature of the behavioral sciences. Individuals who suffer frustrating lives tend to be more hostile, angry, and aggressive than those who are able to achieve their important objectives. In a classic study of incarcerated murderers, sociologist Stuart Palmer determined that convicted killers were significantly more likely than their brothers, who had not been convicted of a violent crime, to have suffered a variety of childhood frustrations. Specifically, murderers were more likely to have had physical disabilities, poor grades, few friends, abusive relationships, chronic illness, and low socioeconomic status.

In a similar way, long-term frustration often plays an important role in the making of a mass murderer. Kyle Huff's life was a series of frustrations best characterized as just "hanging out." No one was able to identify any concrete goals in his life. He was unemployed, living with his brother. His interest in music did not materialize into a career choice but was only an occasional hobby of playing the drums. There was no history of any long-term relationships with women; he was not dating anyone. His one attempt to start a relationship a few months before the shootings was met with rejection despite

his multiple phone calls that were not returned and flowers left at the young woman's door that were not acknowledged. The woman explained that Kyle was not her "type."

The frustrations in Kyle's life may have started in his own family. His father, Willis S. Hough, served in the military and was assigned to Vietnam. It is believed that he may have suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) upon his return home. We do not know if he suffered depressive symptoms or how emotionally available he was to the twins. But Huff's parents divorced when the twins were entering their teen years, and his father later moved to Thailand.

While they were students at Whitefish High School, Kyle and Kane looked and acted different from most of their classmates—they wore black leather coats, combat boots, and had long hair. Their style of dress, however, was not a concern as it did not reflect obsession with violence.

Though hardly bullied or ridiculed to their face, they were never able to make their way into the mainstream, let alone the popular crowd. Neither Kyle nor Kane showed any interest in school-related clubs or sports, despite frequent attempts by coaches to involve these two large youngsters in football. Kyle and Kane were identified as two of the three "least spirited people" in the school. Neither even submitted a photograph to their senior class yearbook.

Neither of the Huff twins did well academically in high school; both ranked near the bottom of their graduating class. In 2002, however, Kane decided to relocate to Seattle to pursue additional education at a community college and to look for work. Kyle tagged along with his twin but continued to show no interest in school or career.

After moving to Seattle, Kyle's employment picture became more and more sporadic. He had been working, off and on (but mostly off), as a pizza deliveryman but was unemployed

at the time he went on his deadly rampage. He had worked briefly delivering for two nearby pizza shops. Two years before that, he was employed for a few days at another pizza chain close to his apartment. With every lost job, he likely became more and more frustrated. Kyle's attention span at work was consistently short. When frustrated, angry, or upset, he just walked off the job rather than tell someone.

Kyle's relationship with his brother was profoundly ambivalent. On the one hand, the twins had an unusually intimate personal relationship. Their high school friends described them as inseparable. Most friends in Montana indicated that Kyle and Kane were always together—like two peas in a pod.

More recently, over their four and one-half years living in Seattle, Kyle apparently depended on his twin brother for companionship and emotional support. But Kane may also have been a source of frustration for Kyle, who never seemed to be able to match his twin brother's level of success, whatever the measure. Kane graduated from North Seattle Community College; Kyle never attended college. Kane had frequent relationships with women after high school; Kyle did not. His inability to be comfortable with women apparently continued into adulthood with his move to Seattle. Huff told several friends in Montana that he was learning to play the drums, but he also made clear that there was no girlfriend in the picture.

Frustration with life comes through in Kyle's suicide note to Kane when he wrote, "this is something I have to do . . . kids like me and you are seriously dying over this shit." Actually, the suicide note reveals not only his frustration but also paranoia and blame, depression, and disorganized thinking.

### ***Precipitants***

In most mass killings, it is possible to identify an event or two that serve to precipitate the

slaughter. In family annihilations, the catalyst is usually a profound financial loss and/or a nasty separation or divorce. A husband-father loses his job and/or battles with his spouse about her absence from the relationship as well as custody of their children. In workplace mass murder, the triggering event typically takes the form of being terminated by a boss or supervisor regarded as unfair and unsympathetic.

In more public mass killings—for example in shopping malls, on college campuses, or in other large gatherings of acquaintances or strangers—the precipitants do not always come clearly to light. In part, the ambiguity may indicate the presence of serious forms of mental illness—profound depression or psychosis—in the perpetrator. He may carry the catalyst in his mind, even though it has only a tenuous connection with his everyday experiences. Although the police were unable to locate any record that Kyle Huff had been treated for mental illness or had taken a psychiatric medication, it is still more than likely that Huff was severely depressed and even somewhat delusional at the time he committed the mass murder.

One of the long-term precipitants in Kyle Huff's rampage may have occurred in 2002 back home in Whitefish, when one of his high school classmates and friends shot to death his parents and himself. Kyle and his brother Kane had been out drinking with the troubled friend on the evening that his murder-suicide occurred and were uncomfortable with his bizarre behavior—reportedly he even talked about what it would be like to kill. Following the tragedy, the twins and their other friends discussed the perpetrator's long struggle with mental illness, but there is no indication that either brother received any type of mental health intervention regarding this incident. It is possible that the murder-suicide provided a model for Kyle Huff's search for a solution to his own personal problems.

Conceivably, as suggested by a biker who claimed to have intimate knowledge of Kyle Huff's victims, the proximate catalyst igniting the killer's anger occurred long before his rampage. The biker informant asserted that Kyle had previously attended raves and was publicly humiliated and ridiculed by some of the younger attendees. According to this view, ravers laughed at him because of his age, his shyness, his conventional clothing, and his hulking physical appearance. To these "hippies," Kyle was not young enough, not cool enough, not funny enough, and not trendy enough. He did not take their drugs, appreciate their music and dances, or engage in their forms of deviant sex. Even among ravers noted for tolerance and acceptance, Kyle was an outsider, someone who did not fit into the crowd.

It was not possible to confirm any such interactions between Kyle Huff and members of the rave community. Yet, in light of the prevailing style of behavior among many ravers, which differed considerably from Huff's, he may have indeed felt awkward, regardless of whether or not he was purposely made to feel that way.

At the "Better Off Undead" party at the Capitol Hill Arts Center, Huff again stood on the sidelines, drinking beer and engaging in some conversation, but never dancing. One 17-year-old girl, who began attending raves a year earlier because of her lack of friends in high school, told a reporter that she noticed Huff at the rave. Arms folded, he was standing by himself against a wall. When she asked him "Is there anything wrong?" and offered her assistance, Huff turned his head, looked her in the eyes, and just said, "Thank you."

Then Huff attended the after-rave party on East Republican Street. According to the biker informant, he was given an invitation only because he was an easy target for his hosts' humiliating remarks. They were looking to have a little fun at Kyle's expense.

Whether the biker's version of motivation is true or not, one of the organizers of the after-party on Capitol Hill told a Seattle police detective that he had invited Huff because it would be entertaining to have someone like Huff at the party: exactly who would find it entertaining remains open to interpretation.

Several of the house residents and friends frequently assumed clown characters and had fun playing or goofing on people in an activity they termed "chicken head." There is no evidence, of course, that Huff was actually mistreated in any way. However, if he were indeed made to feel different, his response, given his existing attitude about raves and ravers, would be explosive.

At the after-party, Huff acted reservedly, and he drank beer from a bottle rather than from the keg. He stood alone silently by the refrigerator. Another young man told reporters that Huff said very little but listened intently to other people's conversations. When he walked by, Kyle asked him suspiciously on three or four occasions, "What's going on here? What's really going on?"

### ***Externalization of Responsibility***

Most mass murderers affix the blame for their personal problems on other people. Otherwise, they would take their own lives but not the lives of others. Because they consider life to be miserable, they seek to commit suicide. But before doing so, they set out to kill those individuals they regard as the source of their miseries.

It is not unusual for mass murderers to write in a letter or note an explanation for their impending actions. They often see themselves as the victim who is going to try to right some wrong or battle some evil force.

In his suicide note, Kyle tried to explain to his twin brother the motivation for his deadly rampage. He saw the responsibility for his killing spree in the behavior of his victims. Kyle sug-

gested that hippies seek to impose "a world of sex" that is unacceptable to him. He would never be able to tolerate, let alone participate in, what he regarded as their immoral exhibitionist sexual orgies. But even worse, Kyle implied in an apparently paranoid accusation that the hippies "are raping us." They had flaunted their sexual relations in order to make him "freak out." Their public displays were meant to cause him discomfort and embarrassment, to cause him to feel annoyed and rejected. Kyle's use of the word "rape" may have more than a figurative meaning: He might also have believed that ravers had attempted to involve him in unwanted sex.

Huff blamed the "hippies and sex" for what he regarded as the sorry state of the world. He wrote to his brother that kids (including himself and his brother) were seriously dying because of this. He hated this world of sex that they (the hippies) were striving to make and called for a revolution. He believed that the things being done by the group could not be ignored. Moreover, he felt that the situation would worsen, requiring him to do something "now."

Whatever his initial attraction to raves, whether it was the music or a potential source of friendship, Kyle Huff soon came to perceive the rave culture and climate as dangerous and evil. Becoming increasingly isolated and withdrawn in his final days, he apparently focused more and more on his own despair, anger, and hostility squarely on the rave scene. The ravers became the scapegoat for every bad thing in his life. With little else going on for him and much free time to contemplate good and evil, Huff saw himself as a the hero—a revolutionary—who would take one small step defeating the evil force.

### ***Isolation***

A recent study conducted by researchers at Duke University and the University of Arizona

suggests that Americans have become more and more isolated over the last few decades. Based on interviews with nearly 1500 American adults, the researchers suggest that adults have fewer friends they can talk with about the most important subjects in their lives. About one quarter have no close confidantes at all. Using the metaphoric image “bowling alone,” Robert Putnam, a public policy professor at Harvard, has similarly highlighted the increasing decline of community support in our society.

Actually, not every location in American society is equally prone to the eclipse of community. There are some cities—for example, Seattle, as well as San Francisco, Miami, Chicago, Houston, and Fairbanks—where countless Americans have relocated for the sake of a new beginning or a last resort. In their new place of residence, they find an abundance of strangers and an absence of support systems. Having left their family and friends back home, perhaps thousands of miles away, the newcomers have few, if any, sources of encouragement, support, and guidance.

Most mass killers are socially isolated, consistent with the popular “loner” stereotype. They either live by themselves or, if residing with friends or family, they do not typically share their problems and frustration. For one or another reason, they are withdrawn or reclusive and feel they have no place to turn when they get into trouble.

Kyle Huff had long been regarded as an outsider. Going to high school in Whitefish, Montana, he never bothered to join any student club or organization. According to a fellow graduate of the class of 1996, Kyle and his twin brother were far from popular students. Whitefish High School was filled with cliques, and the twins did not fit in. It is not that Kyle and Kane were bullied or harassed because they reportedly were not. Their large size—6'5" and 270 pounds—was protective. But they

were apparently ignored by most of their schoolmates, with the exception of a few students who themselves enjoyed little popularity with their schoolmates.

Of course, while still living in Whitefish, Kyle had a small cadre of friends and family members to give him encouragement and support. But his isolation seemed to grow exponentially when Huff moved from his Montana home to a third-floor apartment in Seattle.

In Seattle, it appears that Huff had no significant girlfriends and no close personal relationships apart from his identical twin. In Seattle, he was isolated from his friends in Montana and lacking in work associates as he was often unemployed. His daily schedule was described as searching the Web at home, playing his drums from 4:00–6:00 p.m., and listening to heavy metal music. At night, he would wander through bars and clubs, either alone or accompanied by his brother Kane. Even at raves—in a setting where acceptance is often cited as a major virtue—he was described as a wallflower who stood at the side of the room as the music played and ravers danced.

No one really knew the very troubled and depressed side of Kyle Huff. All people interviewed, including his mother and his brother, were genuinely shocked by news of the mass murder. People did not pay much attention to Kyle's isolation. To the contrary, reports from his friends consistently reflected a kind, sensitive young man who, however, was fairly listless and directionless.

Friends reported that he was unhappy in Seattle. Clearly, he was a fish out of Whitefish; his sense of isolation and loneliness would have become acute after having spent several months back home in Fall 2005.

Isolated in his Seattle apartment, Kyle had no one with whom to share his frustrations as well as his increasingly bizarre point of view about the rave community. Although his twin was

frequently around, the brothers were not particularly known for being expressive.

It has been speculated that there could also have been some resentment brewing between the twins, making it less likely that Kyle would have confided in his brother. Kyle was living where he was not happy because of Kane's decision to relocate there for college and work. Kane may have appeared fed up with his brother's lack of pulling his own weight, depending on him and their mother for economic support.

### ***Access to Firearms***

A semiautomatic firearm is the weapon of choice for someone who selectively seeks to commit a mass murder. Most mass killers have training in and access to guns—they might go hunting, be military veterans, engage in target shooting, or work in a field of security. They may not understand how to use explosives in an effective manner and regard bombs of various kinds as more appropriate for indiscriminately eliminating a large number of people, without regard for who they are as individuals.

Kyle Huff was much more selective in his choice of targets. Huff might have attacked earlier in the evening, while he attended the "Better Off Undead" rave, where large numbers of young ravers were dancing, drinking, and drugging; however, the level of security and the nearby police presence would have deterred him, at least for a while.

Instead, he waited to execute a much smaller number of individuals at the after-party to which he had been invited. His victims and potential victims in the house on Capitol Hill were apparently those "hippies" he singled out as responsible for corrupting the world with their public displays of sexuality and their indifferent, if not harassing, reaction to his presence.

Huff's assault was premeditated and well planned. Indeed, Huff came prepared to wage

war on his enemies. He was methodical and deliberate. When the police later examined the killer's truck, parked one block south of the crime scene, they discovered a Bushmaster semi-automatic assault rifle and hundreds of rounds of ammunition. But the weapons Huff used to carry out his massacre were a 12-gauge pistol-grip Winchester pump shotgun and a .40-caliber semiautomatic Ruger handgun, both of which he carried into the house along with 300 rounds of ammunition stuffed into a black canvas bag.

These were the same firearms that an intoxicated Kyle Huff had used in July 2000 in his Montana hometown to shoot the statue of a moose outside of a bed and breakfast in what many Whitefish residents regarded as a silly prank. In that episode, Huff was arrested by the local police on a felony charge of criminal mischief but, in a plea bargain, eventually plead guilty to a misdemeanor—the vandalism of an artwork moose—for which he paid a fine of \$761 and was asked to write a letter of apology to the sculptor. Because the charge against him was reduced from a felony to a misdemeanor, Huff was not barred from possessing firearms.

Like many other mass killers, he had very little by way of a criminal record or a psychiatric history to serve as a warning sign for his subsequent killing spree. The moose shooting likely was a mere prank in which he took the fall for a number of others who apparently were involved. As a loyal friend, Kyle Huff took credit and the blame, never ratting on his Whitefish friends.

While living in Montana, Kyle and his brother would occasionally go hunting and target practice. Actually, Kyle was not so much a fan of hunting as he was of guns per se—he had a fascination with firearms, according to friends. Even though he lacked a deep interest in hunting, he saw his weapons as means of resolving his deep-felt grudge against rave culture.

### ***Recent Change***

Unlike many cases of mass murder in which a single event (loss of job or a relationship) stands out as a catalyst, in Huff's case there is none. Rather, there appears to be a slow decline in his coping skills.

In the fall of 2005, while back in Montana for a few months, Kyle Huff showed subtle signs of change. Ordinarily a dedicated and kind-hearted companion to a high school friend who years earlier had become schizophrenic, on more than one occasion Huff uncharacteristically blew off plans to visit, without even a call to cancel.

Back in Seattle and again unemployed early in 2006, Kyle Huff was increasingly cut off from people and increasingly desperate for friendship and companionship. He virtually begged one woman whom he met outside a bar to hang with him and be his friend; she was not interested and did not return his calls. Even his brother Kane, despite insistence that there were no signs of trouble or dangerousness, did eventually concede that Kyle had grown more withdrawn than usual in the weeks leading up to the shooting. If nothing else, he was withdrawing into his personal fixation with the evils of rave.

### ***Warning Signs***

It is commonplace in the aftermath of senseless tragedies like the Capitol Hill massacre to wonder if there had been warning signs—obvious or subtle—that may have been missed and if, with intervention, the tragedy could be averted. It is often true that warning signs surface in the investigative postmortem. But they tend only to become clear with 20/20 hindsight.

In Huff's case, there appear to be no such clear-cut signs. His mother, brother, and many close friends have been unable to recall even with hindsight any indication that violence was on the horizon. It is possible, if not probable, that some may be in denial out of fear of

blame and ridicule or just to preserve a positive memory. But the characterization of Kyle as quiet, shy, but pleasant and kind was consistent, even among acquaintances with no reason to conceal.

This does not mean that there are no important lessons that may ultimately reduce the likelihood of mass murder or at least and more likely enhance the well-being of others who might walk in Kyle Huff's shoes. Part of the problem of identifying a mass killer before he strikes may involve the inability of human beings generally to recognize the destructive tendencies of psychologically vulnerable individuals. We simply do not see it coming—suicide, murder, rape, torture, a massacre, or the like. It might therefore be more effective to focus instead on the warning signs of mental illnesses associated with destructive behavior.

Kyle's murderous outburst may not have been predictable, but his isolation, frustration, and depression probably were. Most people who are isolated, frustrated, and depressed do not kill themselves or others; but most people who kill themselves or others are isolated, frustrated, and depressed. Especially in cities like Seattle, where transience has become a way of life, we need to provide easy access to professional counseling not only for children but also for young adults who are in trouble psychologically. As a result, we will surely improve the quality of life for many potential Kyle Huffs who are left to struggle alone. In the process, we might also prevent another tragedy.

### ***Analysis***

The key findings advanced by the analysis of the behavioral evidence are as follows:

- The mass shooting reflected planning by the assailant, not a sudden eruption of rage. His actions were deliberate and methodical, not episodic.

- The shooting was not random. Even though the particular victims wounded or killed were targets of opportunity, the gunman apparently stalked the rave community for his attack.
- There was no evidence of a simple explanation for Kyle Huff's behavior. The massacre did not appear to be the result of media imitation, drug inhalation, or neurological abnormality (although his self-inflicted head wound eliminated any opportunity to examine his brain during autopsy).
- In many respects typical of mass murderers, Huff's actions reflected the long-term and cumulative effects of frustration and isolation, combined with externalization of blame or scapegoating.
- Spending day-after-day alone, unemployed, and separated from friends and family back in Montana, Huff's depression, fueled by his directionless and relatively unsuccessful life, was funneled into an obsession with the perceived dangers associated with the rave community and rave culture.
- Kyle Huff may have been attracted to Seattle's large and active rave community as a possible source of friendship and musical entertainment. The rave lifestyle and belief system were quite alien to his, however. Not fitting in with a group that purports to welcome everyone, Huff may have perceived this as rejection, ultimately blaming the ravers and seeing them in the most negative light.
- Prior to his psychological down spiral, Huff was considered by those who knew him in Montana as kind, friendly, and happy. Indeed, he was happy when surrounded by his network of support. Yet his mood and state of mind in Seattle, where he hardly knew anyone except his twin brother, was clearly different.
- To those who knew Huff well, his murderous behavior was uniformly seen as uncharacteristic. Without question, there were no clear warning signs that could have been observed, even by his twin brother. Though there were subtle signs of emotional trouble, the prospect of violence was beyond consideration.

## Discussion

### *Recovery and Reform*

The March 25 Capitol Hill massacre sent shock waves through the city of Seattle, prompting questions about who the assailant was and why he would murder innocent young men and women who appeared to have welcomed him into their fold.

It is not by accident that one of the first-documented raves held in Seattle in the late 1990s was called PLUR, for "peace, love, unity and respect," some of the elements central to the early rave scene of the 1980s in the United Kingdom where the rave movement began. Acceptance, openness, and positivity are tenets of the rave culture today, which may explain the shock, disbelief, fear, and sense of betrayal that were expressed in media interviews with young people active in the Seattle rave community. Clearly, this brutal act has an impact on all the citizens of Seattle, who must wonder how this kind of massacre can occur in a place that prides itself on its diversity, progressive government, and safe neighborhoods. Several questions reverberate throughout the region: How could this have happened here? How will this affect those who lost loved ones? How will it affect the youth who survived?

In the literature of recovery from natural disasters, such as hurricanes or earthquakes, experts tell us that no one who has experienced the disaster is untouched by it. This is similarly

true of man-made disaster. Of the hundreds who gathered outside the home for an interfaith prayer service on East Republican Street in late March, people of all ages stood together to mourn as loved ones of the victims or as caring, sympathetic members of the community.

In addition to the profound grief and the life-wrenching challenges the families of the deceased must face, terror can wreak havoc on the survivors at the scene—physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. Those most at risk for long-term effects of traumatic stress are those who knew the victims, had previous interactions with the perpetrator, or were eyewitnesses to the shootings. Members of the rave community who could have been at the scene, but happened not to be, could also suffer emotional distress. During the first few months after a homicide, it is normal to experience nightmares, disrupted sleep, or intrusive thoughts or images related to the murders.

Exposure to interpersonal violence, homicide, traumatic death, and injury can create some of the most severe physical and psychological reactions. For youth who witnessed this event, there can be significant responses related to fears of ongoing threat to their safety. They may feel vulnerable outside their homes or experience a roller coaster range of emotions and reactions to the slightest sounds. They may begin to question their personal stability and be hyperalert to any change in the environment that suggests that the same thing could happen again. Young people can be deeply scarred by such a terrifying event. If symptoms persist for months, treatment is strongly indicated. Some studies have shown that adolescents and young adults exposed to acts of mass violence are more at risk for a range of anxiety disorders, PTSD, and depression.

Severe traumas, such as a brutal homicide, have a detrimental effect on interpersonal relationships. Symptoms of PTSD can be disturbing and disruptive to normal daily routines and

interactions, including sudden angry outbursts toward friends and family, social isolation, and loss of pleasure in daily life. Untreated, PTSD and depression can negatively affect a youth's otherwise normal growth and development.

In the aftermath of violence, youth are also more at risk for engaging in risk-taking behaviors, substance abuse, and school and job failure. These risk factors are increased if the young person has had previous experience with community or domestic violence. Some studies suggest that untreated trauma leads to more serious health risks and behaviors, such as obesity and substance abuse, as victims develop into mature adults.

In the immediate aftermath of March 25, 2006, Seattle was fortunate to have the Harborview Child Traumatic Stress Program, a nationally recognized trauma center directed by Lucy Berliner, MSW, provide crucial crisis counseling. Interventions focused on mental health education and trauma may need to be made available to young people who continue to experience traumatic stress, fear, anxiety, and social and emotional disorganization. This agency and others with specialized knowledge and expertise in psychological trauma should continue to play an important part of the overall recovery process in the city.

Recovering from tragedy has many facets and stages. The initial shock and horror of the murders may give way to blame and recrimination. Beyond the psychological and emotional issues of the present, what constructive community actions can be taken in response to this tragedy? A crucial step to recovery is the community's obligation to examine what is known about the crime and the perpetrator—to find answers, to the extent possible, for how and why the tragedy occurred.

The attempt to find answers occurs naturally and spontaneously. Some residents place the responsibility squarely within the rave culture, which has evolved into a complex range of

subgroups, from “Candykids” to Goth ravers, E-tards (a pejorative term for those under the influence of illegal drugs) to “psytrancers.” The implication is that there are dark and dangerous aspects of the rave culture that tolerate and allow for destructive behavior. Like the hippie movement of the 1960s, harmful elements may coexist with creative and humanistic values.

Drugs have been an integral part of rave functions from its inception in the United States. Ravers might argue that drugs are a part of youth culture, not just a part of the rave scene. However, the National Drug Intelligence Center, established in 1993 by the U.S. Department of Justice, differs with that view.

In 2002, the so-called “Rave Act” was introduced by Senator Joe Biden and passed as the Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act (S.226) in 2003. The key provision of the Rave Act was a modification of U.S. Code (21 U.S.C. & 856) creating civil penalties for owners or users of property upon which illegal drug trafficking activities are conducted. Defendants could be fined up to \$250,000 or double their gross receipts, whichever is greater. This controversial act raised further outcries from ravers across the country who protested the Senate’s linkage of illegal drug sales and use with rave events.

In keeping with efforts that reduce illegal and illicit drug activity at raves, various metropolitan authorities have taken a more active role in regulating all nighttime activities more closely, including strict adherence to safety and anti-noise measures. Monitoring the unsupervised activities of youth through upholding existing edicts might include the following:

- Issuing fire code violations when too many people are gathered or exits are blocked
- Responding promptly to noise complaints from nearby residences
- Monitoring parking and traffic flow that could impede roads

- Upholding ordinances against late-night dancing or public assembly without the proper permits
- Preventing loitering or trespassing on private property
- Citing minors out past curfew
- Closing events operating without liquor license and/or with minors present
- Making arrests when drugs or drug paraphernalia are observed
- Providing some form of transportation after rave events for those without cars or who are not in a condition to drive, thereby reducing the need for after-parties
- Permitting off-duty police officers to be hired as security for rave events

Ravers can argue persuasively that the crimes perpetrated by Kyle Huff could have taken place in any setting. However, one powerful strategy for recovery can be a fresh examination of what the city of Seattle has to offer its young people. What are the protective factors and supporting institutions that sustain health and safety? What are the risk factors, unmet needs, and challenges that lead to violence?

We understand that many members of the Seattle community have been critical of rave culture, and certainly the Capitol Hill shooting has given them much fodder for their desire to close it down. To the contrary, the rave community and associated events serve an important function, at least for a segment of the population. Seattle is known as a landing spot for many young drifters, malcontents, homeless, etc. As we have emphasized earlier, the city can be a rather difficult place to feel at home for someone who is new, alone, or lonely. Of course, the rave community is hardly for everyone’s tastes and apparently not for Kyle Huff’s. It is particularly important for a community like Seattle that has substantial in-migration to establish mechanisms for helping people integrate into a new community.

### ***Many Kinds of Victims***

In discussions with secondary and tertiary victims—family members who lost a loved one during Huff's rampage plus members of the wider community dealing with tragedy in its midst—a range of responses to Huff's place in remembrances emerged.

At one extreme were those whose bitterness and anger extended beyond Kyle Huff and on to his family. Whether or not they could or should have seen a change in Kyle's behavior, whether or not they had any influence in producing his sense of malcontent, the Huffs were, according to this perspective, not so deeply victimized because Kyle's death was self-inflicted. There were those who cried out for some public comment and apology from the Huffs, as if they indeed had a responsibility to do so.

There are, on the other hand, others who saw the Huff family as surviving victims too. Not only did they lose a family member but also they must forever deal with personal guilt and whatever blameworthiness the court of public opinion directs their way. Even Kyle's funeral had to be private and secret, not only to avoid a swarm of media trucks and cameras but also possible consecration by vandals.

There was an ongoing effort in Seattle to remember all seven who died in the March 25 massacre. For example, one organization (see <http://www.seattlememorialtemple.org>) planned a "Temple of Light," a seven-sided structure (one for each victim including the assailant) for reflection and prayer.

In a sense, the scope of victimization extended to the rave community, the Capitol Hill area, and Seattle and its vicinity as a whole. There actually appeared to be three phases to a community's response to mass murder.

First, of course, was shock and bereavement for the dead and injured victims. Concurrently, a community—be it defined socially as in the rave network or geographically as in the Capitol

Hill section of the city—must contend with an unwanted association with a horrific event.

The second phase surrounded the police investigation of the episode. The process can, of course, be stressful for families, survivors, witnesses, and neighbors and tends to feel intrusive, even victimizing. Added to this, of course, was the constant presence of the media and the perception that newspapers and television outlets are exploiting and profiting off local tragedy.

The third phase involved the outcome of the investigation and any resulting legal proceedings, including the aftershocks from unexpected or sensitive revelations surrounding the event.

Transition through these stages depended greatly on managing information and avoiding the risk of unnecessarily hurtful rumor and false information. It also depended on a cooperative police-media relationship to ensure that accurate information was disseminated in a timely and responsible fashion.

In conclusion, we strived to maintain a considerate and responsible posture throughout the work of collecting information and reporting on the behavioral analysis and findings. We endeavored to remain open to any and all possibilities and to communicate views and opinions in an accurate and respectful manner. Notwithstanding certain criticism of this initiative from the start, we hoped to have been of some help to the families and friends of the victims and the assailant as well as to the many groups impacted by the massacre.

### **Acknowledgment**

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*Conflict of Interest:* None declared.