

WHAT DID FBI DO WITH EVIDENCE THAT MATEEN WAS A CLOSETED GAY MAN?

By my count there are at least five data points that indicate Omar Mateen, the guy who killed 49 mostly gay (and mostly Latino) men on Sunday morning, was himself gay:

- He used to hang out with a friend from high school, who is a drag queen, and the friend's lesbian co-worker friends
- He asked out a fellow (male) student in cop school
- His ex-wife's new partner claimed (in Portuguese to a Brazilian outlet) that she had said Mateen had gay tendencies, Mateen's father had called him gay in front of her, but the FBI asked her not to say that to the American press
- He used a profile on the gay dating site Jack'd (and, according to one report, Grindr)
- He had been going to Pulse for at least 3 years

That likely makes the story of why he shot up the Pulse far more complex than the one FBI gave to the media early on Sunday, that Mateen had called 911 and claimed he had committed the attack for ISIS. At least some in the gay

community think this attack was more about Mateen struggling with his own sexuality than ISIS.

“He was trying to pick up people. Men,” Van Horn told The Associated Press late Monday outside the Parliament House, another gay club.

Van Horn, a retired pharmacist, said he met Mateen once, and the younger man talked about his ex-wife. But Van Horn said his friends soon “told me they didn’t want me talking to him, because they thought he was a strange person.”

Van Horn acknowledged that he didn’t know Mateen well, but said he suspects that the massacre was less about Islamic extremism and more about a man conflicted about his sexuality.

“I think it’s possible that he was trying to deal with his inner demons, of trying to get rid of his anger of homosexuality,” said Van Horn, who lost three friends in the shooting. “It’s really confusing to me. Because you can’t change who you are. But if you pretend that you’re different, then you may shoot up a gay bar.”

We may or may not get that story going forward. For now, terror “experts” are working very hard to turn Mateen’s claims of affiliations for numerous violently antagonistic Islamic groups (Hizballah, al-Nusra, and ISIS, as well as the Tsarnaevs) into some kind of coherent world view that could explain his actions.

I’m interested, though, in claims that FBI is only now investigating Mateen’s known gay activities, and that primarily in terms of whether he staked out the club or Disney World (which had a series of gay events last week). After all, given the description (here, from Jim Comey’s press conference) of the FBI’s prior investigation into Mateen, it’s hard to imagine

they wouldn't have learned that Mateen was carrying out a closeted gay life.

Now, let me tell you what I can about the FBI's prior contact with the killer. We first became aware of him in May of 2013. He was working as a contract security guard at a local court house. He made some statements that were inflammatory and contradictory that concerned his coworkers about terrorism. First, he claimed family connections to al Qaeda. He also said that he was a member of Hezbollah, which is a Shia terrorist organization that is bitter enemy of the so called Islamic State, ISIL. He said he hoped that law enforcement would raid his apartment and assault his wife and child so that he could martyr himself.

When this was reported to us, the FBI's Miami office opened a preliminary investigation, and over the next 10 months we attempted to determine whether he was possibly a terrorist. Something we do in hundreds and hundreds of cases all across the country.

Our investigation involved introducing confidential sources to him, recording conversations with him, following him, reviewing transactional records from his communications, and searching all government holdings for any possible connections, any possible derogatory information. We then interviewed him twice. He admitted making the statements that his co-workers reported, but explained that he did it in anger because he thought his co-workers were discriminating against him and teasing him because he was Muslim.

After 10 months of investigation, we closed the preliminary investigation. Two months later, in July of 2014, the killer's name surfaced again in an

indirect way. Our Miami office was investigating the Florida man who had blown himself up for the Nusra Front in Syria. Again, the Nusra Front being a group in conflict with ISIL. We learned from the investigation that the killer knew him casually from attending the same mosque in that area of Florida. Our investigation turned up no ties of any consequence between the two of them.

In the course of that investigation, one witness told us, when asked, "Do you know anybody else who might be radicalizing," that he had once been concerned about the killer because the killer had mentioned al-Awlaki videos. The witness had concluded that he later got married, and had a child, and got a job as a security guard, and so he was no longer concerned about him.

Our investigation again turned and interviewed the killer to find out whether he had any significant contacts with the suicide bomber from Nusra, determined that he did not, and then the inquiry continued focusing on the suicide bomber with no further focus on the Orlando killer.

The FBI says they had a tail on him, which should have identified 2-hour long round trips to Orlando to hang out at Pulse, which according to witnesses were already taking place. They say they analyzed his online transaction records which – if the FBI correlated his online identities in the way we know they do – should have identified the Jack'd profile (if it existed in 2014; they surely checked his transaction records again in conjunction with the investigation into his ties with al-Nusra suicide bomber Moner Mohammed Abu Salha).

Either the FBI knew about these things, or their investigation was insufficient to identify other, more traditional terrorist ties (because

if you're not correlating online identities well enough to find the dating profile of a closeted gay guy, you're not correlating them well enough to identify an account protected with any kind of operational security).

None of this is to say that an attraction to Islamic extremism isn't part of why Mateen killed 49 people. A particularly interesting story, in my opinion, is how, on 9/11 Mateen reportedly applauded the attack (side note: what the fuck were teachers doing showing the live video at school of people jumping out of the World Trade Center in any case?).

In an interview, Robert Zirkle, then a freshman at Martin County High School, said he saw Mateen excited and making fun of how America was being attacked on 9/11. "He was making plane noises on the bus, acting like he was running into a building," Zirkle recalled. "I don't really know if he was doing it because he was being taught some of that stuff at home or just doing it for attention because he didn't have a lot of friends."

"Before 9/11 happened, we were pretty straight. We all rode the same bus. We weren't really close friends, but friends at least a little," he added, noting that Mateen attended the Spectrum Alternative School, a separate campus in Stuart for students with poor grades or behavioral issues.

"After 9/11 happened, he started changing and acting different," Zirkle said.

[snip]

"He got bullied a lot," said the former student who sat in the dean's office with Mateen. "It may have been because he was Muslim. But high school can be rough; people can pick on you just because of your name."

The story gets told as a key part of how high school kids' relationship changed with a student at the alternative school. Mateen, who it appears was already being bullied (the students suggest it may be because of his name, but given the other things high school kids bully their peers for I wonder), changed after 9/11, and from that point forward none of the kids pretended to like him anymore.

But it seems that when a Muslim guy invents a terrorist tie explicitly saying he wants the FBI to come after him in response so he can martyr himself protecting a particular image of his life – “He said he hoped that law enforcement would raid his apartment and assault his wife and child so that he could martyr himself” – the Bureau might think a little more critically about what is going on.

Instead, it appears, the FBI assessed Mateen for one and only one thing: whether his bogus claims of ties to terrorist organizations were real. There have been a slew of articles, such as this one or this one, wondering why the FBI didn't “identify” Mateen as a “real” terrorist in its two investigations of him. But it appears the FBI was assessing *only* whether he was likely to commit violence because of—and with the support of—an Islamic terrorist group. It appears they weren't assessing whether he was, like the overwhelming majority of men who commit mass shootings in this country, really screwed up, expressing it in violent ways, and seeking attention with such actions.

It is true that Islamic extremists want to attack this country. It is also true that far, far more Americans die when men carry out mass killings because they're fucked up and begging for attention. If you're Muslim, the easiest way to get attention right now is to say that word, “ISIS,” because it's a guarantee law enforcement and politicians will give that killing more due than they might give the next disturbed mass shooter.

And that, of course, only feeds the Islamic

terrorists while doing nothing about the far larger, and far more lethal, problem of disturbed men with guns.

Update: Let me put it this way, to make it clear I don't mean this to endorse profiling gays. Mateen had many similarities to what we know so far about Adam Lanza (the Sandy Hook killer) and Christopher Harper-Mercer (the Umpqua Community College killer). Neither of the either two were gay (as far as we know). If the FBI had interviewed either of them three times and failed to notice they were dangerously disturbed and prone to violence, how would we respond?