

NATION

# FBI investigators say they have found no evidence that Orlando shooter had gay lovers



Shown is the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Fla., where Omar Mateen opened fire last week, killing 49. (John Raoux / Associated Press)

By **Molly Hennessy-Fiske**

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**S**ince the shooting at an Orlando nightclub last week that left 49 people dead, reports have emerged that gunman Omar Mateen frequented the gay club, used gay dating apps and had gay lovers.

But the FBI has found no evidence so far to support claims by those who say Mateen had gay lovers or communicated on gay dating apps, several law enforcement officials said.

Mateen, 29, told police negotiators he had carried out the shooting that began at 2 a.m. June 12 and ended,

after a three-hour standoff, when he was killed by police.

He claimed the shooting was carried out in allegiance to the militant group Islamic State, as a message to halt U.S. bombing in Iraq and Syria.

Several Pulse regulars have come forward in the days since the shooting, claiming to have seen Mateen at the club or to have been contacted by him on the gay dating apps Grindr, Jack'd and Adam4Adam.

On Tuesday, Univision aired a report in which "Miguel," a man wearing a disguise to conceal his identity, alleged he had sex with Mateen after meeting him on the gay dating app, Grindr. He said Mateen had sex with other men too, including a threesome with a Puerto Rican who allegedly told Mateen, after having had unprotected sex with him, that he was HIV positive.

But investigators do not consider the man's account credible, according to one senior law enforcement official with access to the investigation.

In seeking to verify the reports, federal agents have culled Mateen's electronic devices, including a laptop computer and cellphone, as well as electronic communications of those who made the claims, law enforcement officials said.

So far, they have found no photographs, no text messages, no smartphone apps, no gay pornography and no cell-tower location data to suggest that Mateen — who was twice married to women and had a young son — conducted a secret gay life, the officials said.

The FBI is continuing to explore Mateen's past, but investigators now believe the men who made the claims are not credible, or confused Mateen with someone else.

The FBI has not said whether it has uncovered any evidence that Mateen visited the Pulse nightclub prior to the shooting.

But law enforcement sources did say that investigators have not uncovered any direct links between Mateen and members of Islamic State.

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It is possible that Mateen might have had communications on cellphones or other electronic equipment that have not been recovered by investigators in the wake of the shooting.

Some of those who have claimed to be in contact with Mateen before the shooting continue to insist that the gunman seen in the photos released after the shooting is the same man who visited the nightclub before the shooting.

Kevin West, 29, a Navy veteran and Pulse regular, said Mateen messaged him on Jack'd and also said he [recognized him entering the club](#) on the night of the shooting. After the attack, West turned his phone and app passwords over to police and FBI investigators. He said Mateen didn't reveal his name, but he recognized him from the photo Mateen had posted on the app, which matched one of the gunman released after the shooting.

On Thursday, he dismissed federal investigators' doubts.

"No one is lying about him being on there," West said of the gay apps, adding that "once you have the app and delete your profile, it's gone."

West said the focus should be on keeping guns out of the hands of potentially violent people.

"People died by that man's hands and [the] only thing this country is concerned about is if he is gay or not," West said.

Cord Cedenno, 23, another Pulse regular, insisted he saw Mateen at Pulse months before the shooting and messaged with him on Grindr for a short time, but eventually blocked him because he would only send photos and say "Hi." Cedenno said he has no reason to doubt accounts from other Pulse regulars who have said they had seen Mateen visit the club in the past.

"The FBI obviously is trying to cover up their information," he said of gay men who reported being contacted by Mateen. "I can go take a lie detector test. I know for a fact Omar messaged me."

Cedenno said he did not contact police to tell them about his contact with Mateen, because some of his friends who did had their phones taken and were told not to talk to reporters. He said he doesn't trust the FBI to investigate Mateen, given they questioned him in 2013 and again in 2014, placed him on a terrorist watch list but then removed him from the list.

"They let him go. They let him do this massacre. They could have arrested him. It just does not add up," Cedenno said.

*The Times' Washington, D.C., bureau contributed to this report.*

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