



Editorial Complaints Unit

Jeffrey Dudgeon

Via email: jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com

Our ref: RH/1700076

20 March 2017

Dear Mr Dudgeon

www.bbc.co.uk: Orlando Pulse nightclub – Gunman’s wife arrested

I am writing as promised to let you know the provisional results of my investigation into your complaint. You complained because you felt the article above contained inaccurate information concerning Omar Mateen, which would have given readers to misunderstand his motive.

I should explain that the remit of this unit limits us to considering complaints about specific material broadcast or published by the BBC, which means we can’t consider the charge that the BBC ought to have reported on the FBI’s conclusions elsewhere. I can however consider this concern in reference to the article which caused you to complain, and I hope you will feel this goes to your underlying concerns.

I investigated your complaint against the Editorial Guidelines regarding [Accuracy](#). These refer to “due” accuracy – what is “adequate and appropriate” in the context of the output – and stress the importance of ensuring output does not mislead its audience on a material matter. I understand your primary concern to be that reporting the stories of those who have said Mateen was gay, while not reporting the position of the FBI, would give people to misunderstand his motive, in that readers may not have understood that his commitment to Islamic State was behind the shooting. You point to the fact the FBI were reported to have said they could find no evidence of Mateen being actively gay.

I take your point on the importance of not misleading readers as to the gunman’s motives. However, these were made very clear at the top of the piece (my emphasis):

Fifty-three people were also wounded by Mateen, who vowed allegiance to so-called Islamic State (IS).

Police interviewed Ms Salman last year, believing she may have been aware of her husband’s plans.

She told the FBI her husband had become radicalised in the year leading up to the attack.

He made his pledge of allegiance during the actual assault, which lasted three hours.

In the light of the above, I do not think subsequent references to those reports suggesting he may have been gay would have misled readers. The immediate and lasting impression I took from the piece was that Mateen believed himself to be acting in allegiance to IS – which was reported here as an established fact, reflecting what was known to be true from the recordings. The subsequent references to his sexual orientation were, by contrast, presented as claims. They may have given rise to theories about the reasons why he had made that pledge, such as internalised homophobia – but they would not have caused readers to believe he had not made it.

As you know, the FBI were reported to have been unable to find concrete evidence to prove reports suggesting Mateen had used gay apps, gay pornography, or had boyfriends. However, this falls short of suggesting they had concluded definitively that he was not actively gay – rather, they had not been able to prove this to their satisfaction. The **Orlando Sentinel** report which covered this development¹ made clear that despite this, they had not stopped following leads on this aspect, or reached a conclusion on why he had chosen to target this club.

I agree this information would have told readers more about the case and the investigation and the article would have been better for its inclusion. However it does not follow that without this, anyone would have been misled by the reporting in the manner you describe, given the very clear information the piece contained about Omar Mateen's pledge to IS and the account of his radicalisation. I don't therefore feel able to conclude this amounted to a serious breach of the BBC's editorial standards and I do not feel able to uphold your complaint.

As you know, this represents a provisional finding, and I would be happy to consider any points you might wish to make in the next ten working days.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Hutt', with a stylized, cursive script.

Richard Hutt
Complaints Director

¹ <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/pulse-orlando-nightclub-shooting/os-orlando-nightclub-shooting-gay-evidence-lacking-20160623-story.html>