

Exploratory study of homophobia in Wallonia-Brussels Federation male amateur football

Louis Minon¹, Marc Cloes¹, & Zeno Nols²

¹ Department of Sport and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Liege

² Research group Social Inclusion, KdG University College



2023 AIESEP International Conference - Santiago de Chile - July 6, 2023

Emerging Horizons: bridging the borders between physical education research and practice



Louis Minon









Marc Cloes






Zeno Nols

Review of Anglo-Saxon literature

- A **hetero-masculine norm** is regularly established within sport, particularly through what coaches say to their athletes (Adam, Anderson, & McCormack, 2010) 
- Male athletes are encouraged to show their **masculinity** in the form of aggression or resistance to pain (Messner, Dubar & Hunt, 2000), but also by using misogyny and **homophobia** (Kimmel, 1994) 
- 84% of gay athletes are **insulted** because of their homosexuality (Denison & Kitchen, 2016) 
- Anti-gay discourse is part of the **heteronormative** framework present in sport (Butler, 1990), as is the **"Don't ask, don't tell!" policy** with regard to gay identities (Anderson, 2002) 
- Young athletes are taught from an early age that being gay or being unable to prove their heterosexuality is unacceptable (Messner, 1992). 
- Homosexual athletes have to present an image of 'normality' by conforming to **hetero-masculine norms** in order to be accepted in a sporting context (Price, 2000) 

3

Review of the francophone literature

- Sporting individuals report significantly more negative attitudes towards homosexuals than non-sporting individuals (Mette, Lecigne, Lafont, & Décamps, 2012) 
- 58% of football players use expressions such as "Tarlouze!" or "Tapette!" when watching a football match (Teinturier, Pham & Lussion, 2018) 
- 16.8% of Belgian referees have been confronted with homophobic behaviour in the last two years (RBFA, 2020) 



- The Anglo-Saxon literature on homophobia in sport is part of a different cultural context to ours and rarely deals specifically with football
- There are few Belgian studies dealing with homophobia in football

→ **Need to deal specifically with amateur football in Wallonia-Brussels Federation + propose the foundations of a general and current analysis of the situation**

4

Aims of the study/Research questions



- ✓ To contribute to the understanding of homophobia issue in men's amateur football in WBF
- ✓ To identify what might encourage greater inclusion of homosexuality in this context



- How is homophobia currently expressed in amateur football in the WBF?



Relationship with masculinity / Language issues / ...

- Do those involved in amateur football in the WBF feel concerned by the issue of homophobia?



Everyone's role in achieving greater inclusion / Importance of training / ...

- Are those involved in amateur football in the WBF aware of the various measures currently implemented to fight against homophobia?



Anti-discrimination policy of the federation and clubs / Communication / ...

5

Methods

- Mixed study :



**Online survey
(quantitative)**

*Voluntary participation
(non-probabilistic)*



**Interviews
(qualitative)**

*Judgemental sampling
(non-probabilistic)*

- Participants: players in men's amateur football in the WBF



Players



Coaches
Youth trainers



Referees



Managers
Volunteers
Committee members

6

Findings and discussion



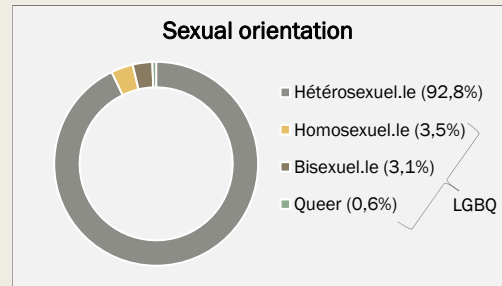
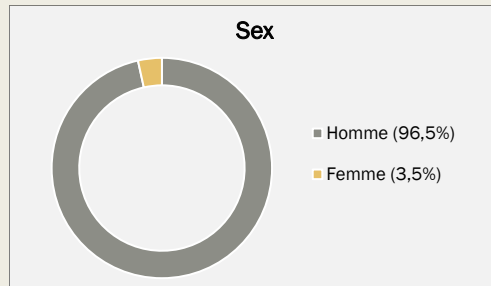
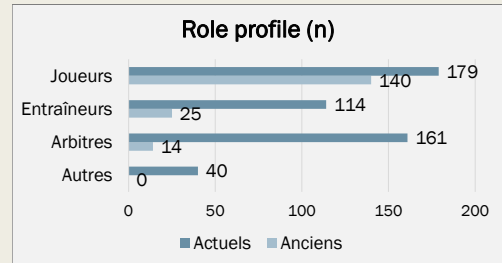
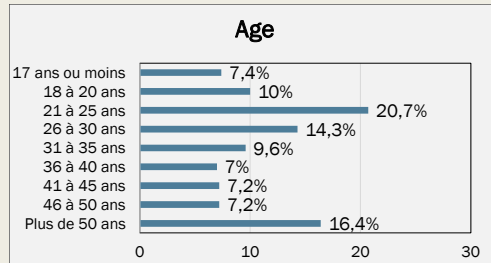
- Demographic data
- How is homophobia currently expressed in amateur football in the WBF?
- Do those involved in amateur football in the WBF feel concerned by the issue of homophobia?
- Are those involved in amateur football in the WBF aware of the various measures currently implemented to fight against homophobia?

7

Part 1

Demographic data

Online survey (n=511)



9

Interviews (males)



| Players | Coaches | Referees | Club managers |
|------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 18 y.o., Hainaut | 22 y.o., Hainaut | 33 y.o., Namur | No answer |
| 27 y.o., Brabant | 41 y.o., Liege | 47 y.o., Luxembourg | No answer |
| 36 y.o., Liege | 53 y.o., Namur | 24 y.o., Hainaut | No answer |

10

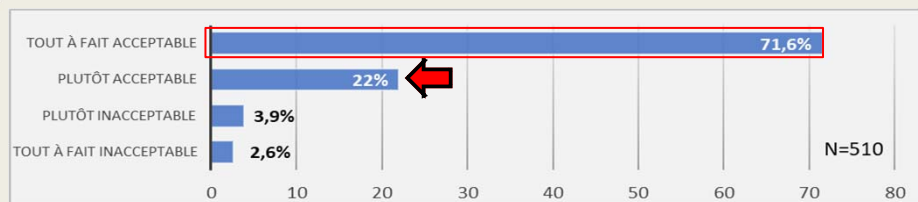
Part 2

How is homophobia currently expressed in amateur football in the WBF?

Acceptance of homosexuality



Personally, I think that being gay in men's football is ...



Homosexuality is accepted by the majority of respondents, but...

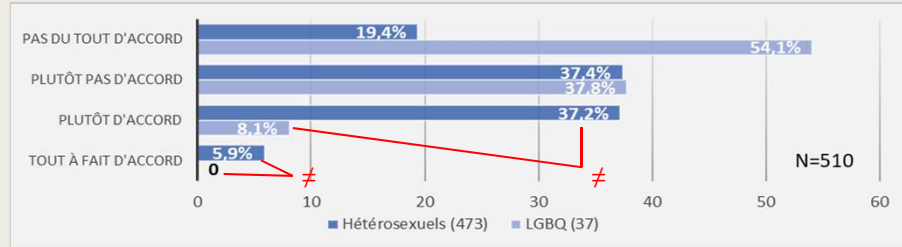


[...] it's true that it would have been very badly seen if we knew that someone was homosexual and that they were in the same changing room as us to wash together, etc... I don't have a problem with that, but it's true that it could be quite a hostile environment for homosexuals, yes, that's for sure. (Referee, 33 y.o.)

[...] I think there will always be those who are reluctant. And yes, out of a core group of twenty players, there's bound to be one or two, maybe three, who would take a dim view of it and who, behind their backs, would talk rubbish or refuse to accept it.. (Player, 36 y.o.)

Belief in stereotypes

? What do you think of this statement? A homosexual man is more effeminate than a heterosexual man.

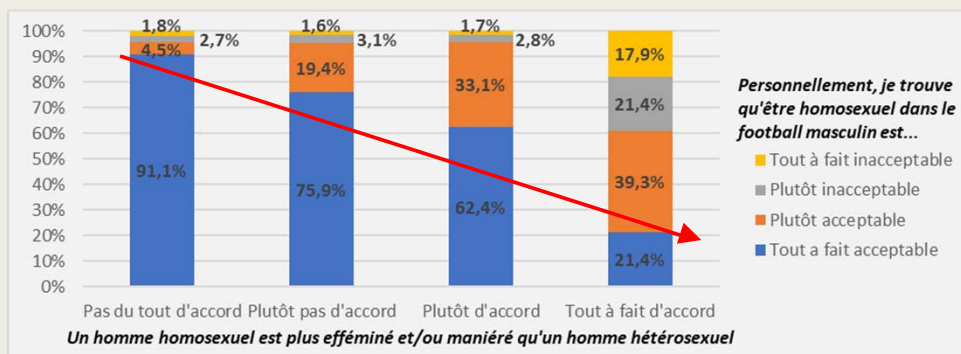


The belief that a homosexual man is more effeminate than a heterosexual man is still fairly widespread, especially among heterosexuals ($p < .001$).



In homosexual couples, [...] generally speaking, there's one who's the man and one who's the woman. The one who's the woman is too effeminate to play in a football team, and I don't even think he's interested in that. (Referre, 47 y.o.)

Link between the alleged homosexuals' femininity and the (non-)acceptance of homosexuality

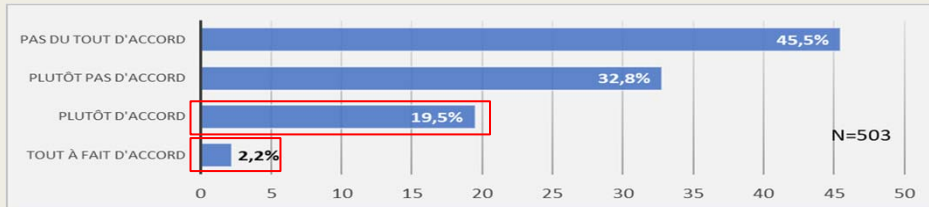


Respondents who thought a gay is more effeminate were more likely to find homosexuality in men's football unacceptable ($p < .001$).

Promoting virility and aggression



What do you think of this statement? *The more virile and aggressive a player is, the better he will perform on the pitch.*



Virility and aggressiveness are seen as performance factors by 1 participants out of 5. These 2 aspects therefore seem to be valued, ... sometimes to the detriment of homosexuality.

[...] It's true that when you're aggressive, virile and not necessarily nice to the opposing team, you get more respect and they're more afraid of you. And it's often not associated with the image of homosexuals, even though it could very well be. But in society, it's not.. (Player, 18 y.o.)



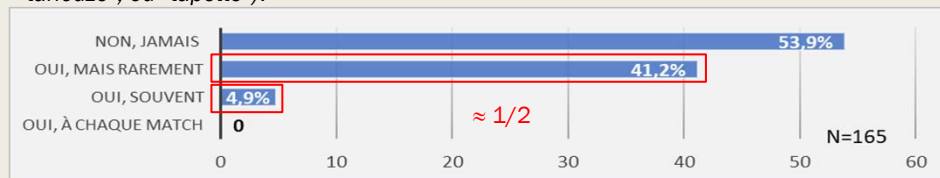
[...] remarks like: "It's not a girl's sport! There might be a little homophobic remark, like: "We're not faggots! Or something like that. I must have heard that, so yes, I have the impression that aggressiveness is valued. (Player, 27 y.o.)

15

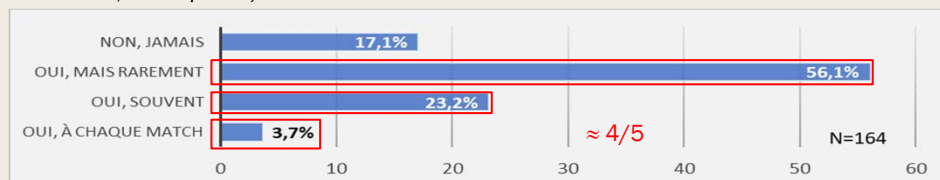
Use of insults linked to homosexuality



When you are playing a match, do you ever use expressions like "faggot" ("pédé", "tarlouze", ou "tapette")?




When you are playing a match, do you hear other players say things like "faggot" ("pédé", "tarlouze", ou "tapette")?

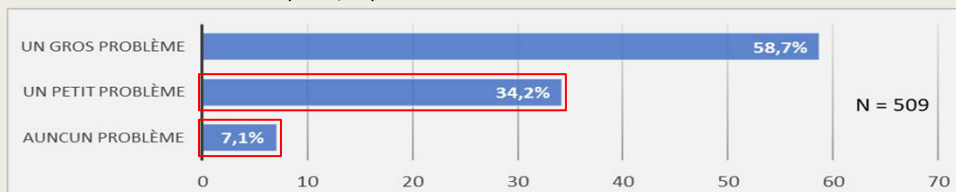


Insults linked to homosexuality are almost omnipresent during matches

16

Interpreting insults related to homosexuality

 According to you, do insults such as “faggot” (“pédé!”, “tarlouze!” and “pédale!”), which can be heard on or around the pitch, represent ...



Over 40% of respondents seem to minimise the negative impact of such insults.

[...] In insults, there are words that come out of the mouth but aren't necessarily said with the real intention of causing harm. (Coach, 53 y.o.)



When I say "Faggot!" (« Tapette !» ou « Pédé ! ») to a mate, it's not necessarily to do with homosexuality. It's more like saying "Fragile!" or "You're rubbish!" (Player, 18 y.o.)

I've already heard a fan say to an opposing player, "You little faggot" or something like that, and it just went by. So we don't even mention it any more, it's part of folklore. (Referee, 33 y.o.)

17

Referees' reactions to insults

According to the rules, any obscene, abusive or discriminatory language must be penalised with a red card. However, referees sometimes take a different view of the issue ...



| | | | | |
|-----|--------|---|-------------|--|
| A14 | 1 2 | Propos déplacés ou critiques répétées (sans être injurieux) vers un arbitre/assistant vers toute autre personne | 2 2 | |
| A16 | 1 2 | Gestes, comportements ou propos obscènes ou injurieux vers un arbitre/assistant vers toute autre personne | 3 2 | |
| A18 | | Propos ou comportements racistes ou discriminatoires | Convocation | |

The rules lack precision on that topic and leave room for referee's interpretation. It is difficult to come up with a sanction that is consistent and coordinated between all the referees in the Football Association.



They could do it [impose sanctions], but then they'd need a list of things not to say, of what to look out for and what not to look out for. So for them, it's mission impossible. (Coach, 53 y.o.)

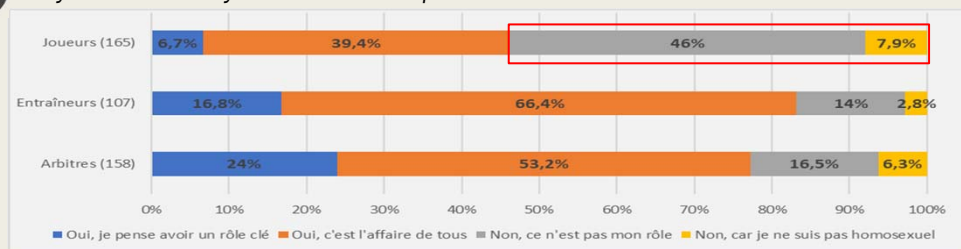
18

Part 3

Do those involved in amateur football in the WBF feel concerned by the issue of homophobia?

Everyone's role in the problem

? Are you concerned by the issue of homophobia?



Unlike coaches and referees, players seem to have little awareness of the role they can play in the issue of homophobia.

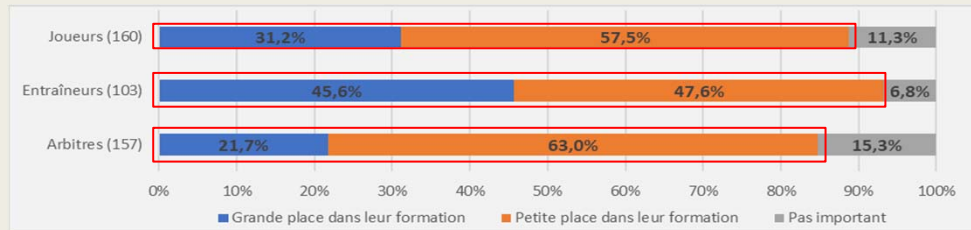


Even if the coach is understanding and makes sure there's no mockery, he can't always be there. So the players also need to be made aware of these issues. Because if they mess up in this area, they can also play a role in the person's well-being. (Player, 27 y.o.)

The importance of referee training



In your opinion, should referees be made aware of discrimination and homophobia in particular during their training?



The majority of respondents felt that homophobia should be addressed in referee training...



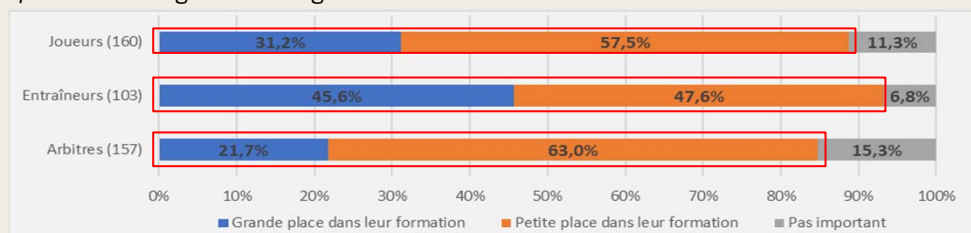
Je crois que la réponse à ces comportements peut être réfléchi de manière coordonnée. [...] dans la formation de leur dire : « Voilà, soyez conscients que vous pouvez être confrontés à du racisme, à de l'homophobie, à de l'agressivité, à ceci, à cela, ... Et voici une série de clés pour y répondre ». (Joueur, 27 ans)

21

The importance of referee training



In your opinion, should referees be made aware of discrimination and homophobia in particular during their training?



The majority of respondents felt that homophobia should be addressed in referee training... but the current initiatives do not seem to be enough right now



No, we've just been trained in the laws of the game. (Referee, 47 y.o.)

I think we were more prepared for racism than homophobia. Because you can identify racism, they wear it on their faces. Homosexuality, I couldn't say. (Referee, 33 y.o.)



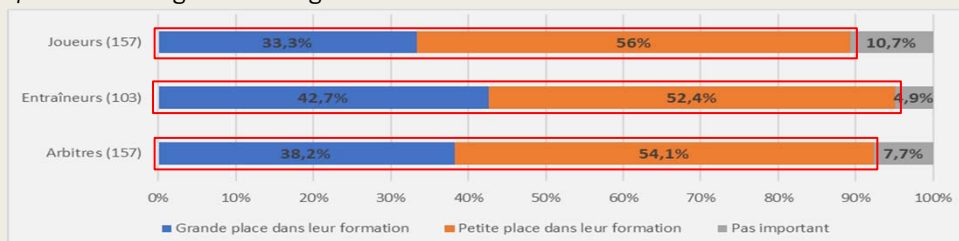
Few candidates will to become referees

22

The importance of coach education



In your opinion, should coaches be made aware of discrimination and homophobia in particular during their training?



Here again, the vast majority of respondents agreed that homophobia should be addressed in coach training.

[...] the coach is in a position of authority in relation to a group and the individuals in that group, so he's a decisive factor in creating a good atmosphere and respect when it comes to homophobia or racism. In my opinion, the first person who can prevent problematic behaviour is the coach. (Player, 27 y.o.)



I think that at some point in their training, this must be developed somewhere. [...] Being aware of all this and trying to manage, defuse or even know how to find the right people: "Here I am, I'm a coach, I've got a problem, I've got a player who's gay and who's uncomfortable because there are insults flying...". (Player, 36 y.o.)

23

Part 4

Are those involved in amateur football in the WBF aware of the various measures currently implemented to fight against homophobia?

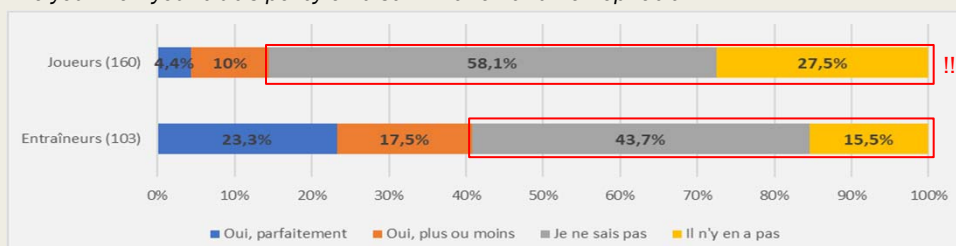
24

Politique des clubs

Specific rules on discrimination, anti-discrimination charter, awareness-raising initiatives, information for young people, etc.



Do you know your club's policy on discrimination and homophobia?



The majority of respondents did not know their club's position on discrimination, or said that their club had no policy in this area.

The club where I coach is really small, and they don't have much power. So even if they wanted to do it, it wouldn't be on many youngsters. [...] I'm not sure that the role of this small club is important in this. (Coach, 22 y.o.)



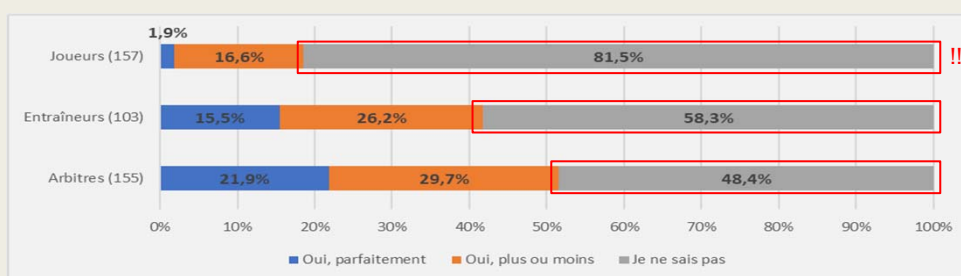
There aren't any at our club either. [...] But it's true that the players represent their club. If they want to be seen as good by everyone, I think that should be put in place. (Player, 18 y.o.)

25

Federation policy (ACFF/RBFA)



Are you familiar with the Football Association's policy on discrimination and homophobia?



The majority of survey participants were not aware of the regulations, awareness campaigns and measures in place to combat homophobia.

I don't remember hearing about or seeing any action of this type. [...] I have the impression that people are more aware of the issue of racism, so it's more important. The issue of homophobia is more muted, less directly addressed. (Player, 27 y.o.)



Apart from advertising campaigns, I don't know, you know. [...] there needs to be better communication. Let everyone know. (Referee, 33 y.o.)

26



Limits of the study



- The effect of social desirability may have encouraged participants to give answers that would lead them to accept homosexuality, since this is increasingly a social norm
- The participants in the questionnaire voluntarily chose to take part in the study and are therefore probably already aware of the issue of homophobia
- Interview participants are few in number and generally come from the same social background as the first author (university, rural environment, etc.)
- The various provinces of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation are not always fairly represented



27

Conclusions

- Homosexuality is still very much associated with the idea of femininity within amateur football, and insults referring to homosexuality are regularly used.
 - The federation should take a clear stance on insults referring to homosexuality and explicitly communicate this position to all affiliates.
- While most coaches and referees seem to be aware of the role they have to play in combating homophobia in football, this does not seem to be the case for players.
 - Players need to be made aware of the impact their behaviour can have on the general atmosphere in football. The coach seems to be the best placed person to educate his players on topics such as homophobia, which is why it is so important to address this issue during training sessions.
- Most people involved in amateur football are unaware of the federation's policy on homophobia. The same applies to club policy, insofar as it exists.
 - Generally speaking, the federation and clubs should strive to give greater visibility to the fight against discrimination. Better communication between the various players is therefore essential.

28

References

- Adams, A., Anderson, E., & McCormack, M. (2010). Establishing and challenging masculinity: The influence of gendered discourses in organised sport. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 29(3), 278–300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X10368833>
- Anderson, E. (2002). Openly gay athletes: Contesting hegemonic masculinity in a homophobic environment. *Gender and Society*, 16(6), 860-877. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124302237892>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Denison, E. & Kitchen A. (2016). Out on the field: The first international study on homophobia in sport. <https://www.outonthefields.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Out-on-the-Fields-Final-Report.pdf>
- Kimmel, M. (1994). Homophobia as masculinity: Fear, shame and silence in the construction of gender identity. In H. Brod & M. Kaufman (Eds.), *Theorizing masculinities* (pp. 223-242). Sage Publications. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452243627>
- Messner, M. (1992). *Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity*. Beacon Press.
- Messner, M., Dunbar, M., & Hunt, D. (2000). The televised sports manhood formula. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24(4), 380-394. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723500244006>
- Mette, A., Lecigne, A., Lafont, L. & Décamps, G. (2012). Évaluation des attitudes des sportifs français envers les homosexuels : effets du genre et du type de sport. *Staps*, 33(2-3), 157-167.
- Price, M. (2000). *Rugby as a gay men's game*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Warwick]
- RBFA (2020, May 10), Signalez tout acte ou propos homophobe. <https://www.rbfa.be/fr/nouvelles/signalez-tout-acte-ou-propos-homophobe>, consulté le 03/07/2020 à 14h56
- Teinturier, B, Pham, D. & Lussion, G. (2018). Homosexualité dans le football: perceptions des Français. IPSOS. https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2018-05/francais_et_lhomosexualite_dans_le_football_0.pdf

31

Images

- <https://www.freepng.fr/png-kumzhhb/>
- <https://www.pngplay.com/fr/image/136170>
- https://www.flaticon.com/fr/icone-gratuite/recherche_1162914
- https://www.flaticon.com/fr/icone-gratuite/arretez_827692
- https://fr.123rf.com/photo_69037884_ic%C3%B4ne-de-vecteur-saint-homme-symbole-plat-noir-le-pictogramme-est-isol%C3%A9-sur-un-fond-blanc-con%C3%A7u-pour-les-in.html
- <https://www.servicevolontaire.org/mission-volontariat/fr/le-volontariat-ouvert-a-tous-et-a-toutes/>
- https://fr.123rf.com/photo_75473706_symbole-de-l-universit%C3%A9-ic%C3%B4ne-de-vecteur-illustration-de-logo-solide-pictogramme-isol%C3%A9-sur-blanc.html
- <https://www.shutterstock.com/fr/image-vector/country-house-green-home-icon-real-791137963>
- <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Logo-federation-wallonie-bruxelles.jpg>
- <https://www.cnetfrance.fr/produits/5-alternatives-a-adobe-reader-pour-lire-vos-pdf-39935893.htm>
- <https://fr.dreamstime.com/illustration-stock-portugais-obrigado-mercis-en-forme-coeur-nuage-mot-blanc-image52311802>

32