

# Casual spectators and die-hard fans' reactions to their team defeat: A look at the role of territorial identification in elite French rugby



## Reacciones de los espectadores ocasionales y de los fanáticos frente a la derrota de su equipo: Una mirada en el papel de la identificación territorial en los equipos élite de rugby en Francia

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### ABSTRACT

This research investigated the role of two foci of identification (team and territory) on identity management strategies used by sport followers in the particular context of elite French rugby union. In study 1 which dealt with casual spectators (N = 153), the results corroborated numerous studies conducted in the North-American context and showed that team identification constitutes a strong driver for offensive and loyalty reactions. In study 2 which dealt with die-hard fans (N = 64), it appeared that team identification seems to be the best predictor of team loyalty strategy whereas territorial identification seems to be the first predictor of offensive strategies. Taken together, the studies showed the importance of considering the specific context in which sport fandom takes place.

**Key Words:** Defeat, threat, identity management strategies, identification, rugby.

### RESUMEN

Esta investigación estudia el papel de dos focos de identificación (el equipo y el territorio) en las estrategias de gestión de identidad usadas por los seguidores deportivos en el contexto particular de la unión francesa de rugby de élite. En el estudio 1, realizado en una muestra de espectadores ocasionales (N = 153), los resultados corroboraron los numerosos estudios conducidos en el contexto norteamericano y demostraron que la identificación del equipo constituye un conductor fuerte para las reacciones ofensivas y de lealtad. En el estudio 2, realizado en una muestra de seguidores incondicionales (N = 64), parecía que la identificación del equipo fuera el mejor predictor de la estrategia de lealtad del equipo mientras que la identificación territorial parecía ser el primer predictor de estrategias ofensivas. De forma conjunta, los dos estudios demostraron la importancia de considerar el contexto específico en el cual sucede el seguimiento deportivo.

**Palabras Clave:** Derrota, amenaza, estrategias e identificación del rol deportivo, identificación, rugby

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## INTRODUCTION

For sport fans and spectators, also called *followers*<sup>1</sup>, each confrontation of their local team provides the symbolic support of some facets (e.g., ethnic, gender, social-class, territorial) of their social identity (Heere & James, 2007). In French rugby union, the territorial grounding seems particularly salient as argued by Bonnet (2007, p. 49) for who “rugby is a sport whose practice is strongly linked to territory”. Game reactions, therefore, provide a way to express a support to this territorial identity (Bernache-Assollant, Lacassagne, & Braddock II, 2007). In this specific sport context, the decision taken in August 1995 to call into question the amateurism principles of rugby union by accepting professionalism disturbed the different stakeholders involved in the game (Augustin, 1999). Indeed, this new sport structure has considerably increased players' mobility. Teams are not mainly composed of local players anymore, and who were born and raised in the city or the region of their club, and knew many of their followers. In other words, the ‘rugby des villages’ (Di Méo, 1998), that is the link woven between the team and the local community, seems to be ‘dead’, even if some medias try hard to maintain a “territorial imaginary” (Bonnet, 2007).

In this particular context, we believe that the territorial source of identification should allow us to uncover some of the processes underlying followers' reactions. Is it really the case? What is the contribution of territorial identification on the reactions displayed by rugby followers in regard to those of traditional team identification? And furthermore, do these variables have the same impact on every kind of sport followers? The purpose of the present exploratory research was to address these two questions.

### *SIA, casual spectators and die-hard fans*

From a contemporary sport psychology perspective, the social identity approach (SIA; Haslam, 2004), which refers to the integrated frameworks of social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), represents a relevant theoretical framework to better understand the reactions of people who regularly follow sports--sport followers--whose behavior might otherwise seem quite irrational or pointless (see Boen, Vanbeselaere, Pandelaere, & Schutters, 2008). According to SIA, individuals (1) define themselves to a large extent in terms of their social group memberships, and (2) seek to develop a positive social identity generally by comparing one's own group (i.e., ingroup) positively to other groups in a salient context (i.e., outgroups). In this stream, psycho-sociological frameworks dealing with sport events highlight team identification as an intensity modulator of followers' affective, cognitive and behavioral reactions (see Bernache-Assollant, 2010; Wann, 2006 for complete reviews).

According to this theoretical point of view, team identification is defined as “the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as fans of the team, are involved with the team, are concerned with the team's performance, and view the team as a representation of themselves” (Branscombe & Wann, 1992, p. 1017). In line with this definition, it seems widely accepted in the sport science community that at least two main categories of followers may exist (see e.g., Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). First, the least identified ones also called *casual spectators*, for whom the fanship identity is only a peripheral component of their self-concept. In short, casual spectators have an interest in sport events, can sometimes demonstrate allegiance for a specific team (they are moderately identified) but they mainly tend to consume mediated sporting spectacles (i.e., TV viewing at home) because they are particularly sensitive to live events constraints (e.g., ticket prices, uncomfortable settings, bad weather; see Trail et al., 2003). In line with their identification level and their specific consumption modes, casual spectators' attitudes towards a team can be easily influenced by factors such as team performances or sporting comments (Wann et al., 2001; Parker & Fink, 2008).

Contrary to casual spectators, *die-hard fans* are extremely identified with their team and this role is a strong component of their identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). As a consequence, it can even become an extension of themselves and lead die-hard fans to possess a great level of knowledge about their team (e.g., in terms of team composition, players statistics; see Wann et al., 2001). In line with this social identity, they tend to have strong and stable attitudes towards their team and a direct consumption of sports which implies live attendance and the will to have an impact on their environment.

In sum, this differentiation of the public in the way they are identified, they attend and watch sporting events seems to be affecting both the way that people support and follow their sport teams and the meaning of their social belonging and identification (Bouchet, Bodet, Bernache-Assollant, & Kada, 2011).

For casual spectators and die-hard fans, one of the most relevant dimensions for social comparison, and consequently one of the most relevant dimensions of group *threat value*, is their team's performance (Wann, 2006). Research on sport fanship has identified several different *identity management strategies* which are strongly linked to the team identification level and which help individuals to cope with a defeat and enhance a social identity. These strategies can be classified in two main categories: team loyalty and offensive strategies. Loyalty strategies only alter followers' personal situations but not for the team whereas the aim of offensive strategies is to change the ingroup's negative position (i.e., followers and team) in a salient intergroup context.

### *Team identification and identity management strategies*

Perhaps the most frequently studied strategy deals with the manipulation of one's association with a team. It has been shown that after a team defeat, followers can hide their connection with it to protect their social identity (Wann, 2006). This phenomenon, which is similar to the SIA's concept of social mobility, is known as cutting of reflected failure--CORFing (Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986). In regard with the link between team identification and the CORFing strategy, Wann and Branscombe (1990) found that college students with high levels of team identification were less likely to CORF after their team's loss than those with low team identification levels. In sum, for followers with high team identification levels, CORFing did not seem to be a viable option because they displayed loyalty to the team (see also Spinda, 2011; Ware & Kowalski, 2012).

Research on sport fanship suggests that highly identified followers may use offensive strategies to restore a positive social identity such as derogating the opponents and out-group fans in particular. This strategy, which refers to the social competition option of the SIA, has been labeled *blasting* (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; see also Crisp, Heuston, Farr, & Turner, 2007). Specifically, by acting hostilely toward out-group members, highly identified followers can feel as if they were better than the followers of other teams. Finally, highly identified followers may use social creativity strategies to restore a positive social identity when threatened by their team's loss. One of these offensive strategies is called *boosting* or indirect basking (Finch & Cialdini, 1989; see also Markman & Hirt, 2002 for a similar strategy called *allegiance bias*) and consists in re-evaluating negative comparative dimensions caused by a team defeat by accentuating the future success of the team (e.g., "even if we lose today, we are still the best and we will win lots of trophies this year"). This strategy is closed to the social creativity strategy labeled temporal comparison which consists, for group members, in referring to their past or future to boost the current status of their team threatened by a poor performance.

In short, the overview presented above revealed that team identification constitutes a strong driver for numerous affective, cognitive and behavioral reactions. Recently, Trail and collaborators (e.g., Kwon, Trail, & Anderson, 2005; Trail et al., 2003) have proposed to study others sources of identification or points of attachment in the sport fanship context such as specific players, coaches, university, community, sport and specific level of sport to better understand followers' reactions. As outlined by these authors, specific sources of identification can be more or less relevant in regard to the types of followers and to the specific context where sport fanship takes place. For instance, Kwon and collaborators (2005) found in their study that community identification, also called territorial identification (Bonnet, 2007) or geographical identification (Heere & James, 2007), was considered as

inappropriate because the city itself was small and known to be a university town. Given that in a recent literature review, Bernache-Assollant (2010) identified that, of all the articles published in sport and social psychology journals and dealing with identity management strategies and fanship from a SIA framework, almost 65% of them were conducted in the USA and concerned university student fanship, it is not totally surprising that the specific role of territorial identification has not been further studied from a psycho-sociological perspective. We propose to fill this gap in the specific context of French rugby union where the territorial dimension seems particularly salient. Then, the main purpose of this paper is to explore the relative contribution of two foci of identification (i.e., team and territory) on identity management strategies used by casual spectators and die-hard fans.

### *The present research*

As evoked in the introduction, in the French rugby context, following a club or a team is an activity which conveys social meanings because of the strength of its territorial dimension (Bonnet, 2007). Each confrontation provides the symbolic support of a local identity and exacerbates cleavages between cities, particularly in 'local derbies' when team from neighboring towns or villages clash (Chaix, 2004). Put in another way, the rugby team, such as other specific symbols of a local culture like food, historical monuments, dances and songs to name a few, is traditionally an 'elliptical' expression of the community and plays an active part in the preservation of a local territorial identification (Augustin, 1999). As a consequence, a defeat of the local team could represent a threat to the territorial identity of the followers.

Using a SIA framework, rugby teams traditionally represent for spectators and fans the *prototype* of the superordinate category 'habitant of the city' that is the best representation of a local collective identity. The issue of prototypicality judgments lies at the heart of the SCT part of the SIA. SCT suggests that people define themselves and others through the placement of self and others within multiple group categories operating at varying "levels of abstraction", with personal and social identity representing opposite ends of this continuum (Oakes, 2003, p. 8). More specifically, this theory proposes that people compare and evaluate the different sub-groups as a function of how much they are seen as being prototypical of the relevant superordinate category which provides norms and standards that are used to evaluate them. The prototype of category membership represents a set of characteristics considered as emblematic of the superordinate category. Moreover, these prototypes do not only have a descriptive role as they also prescript perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors (Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007 for a review). As a result, in a classical intergroup context, followers use the local team as a benchmark or source of identification to evaluate ingroup and outgroup members who support the team of the 'other city'. In other words, the categorization "Us" and "Them", "our city" against

“their city” is traditionally built with the help of the local team which represents the prototype of the local identity (e.g., the university identity in the North-American context).

Nevertheless, the changes which have affected French rugby union at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the development of mass commercialisation and the emergence of “sport spectacle” (i.e., professionalism process), question the role played by teams in the construction of this collective identity. Indeed, rugby teams are no more only composed of local players born in the local city who convey the traditional values and culture of their respective geographical place but also of non local French and foreign players, from European and southern hemisphere (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Islands and South Africa) countries (Chaix, 2004). Moreover, more and more followers have become disappointed with outwardly greed-driven owners and players. This kind of fans may think that teams and owners have broken the link with their fan base and the true nature of rugby. Thus, about ten years after that the professionalism process started in the French rugby union context, some authors argue that the traditional link between followers and their local rugby team is under question as professional teams are not anymore able to preserve the local identity (see e.g., Augustin, 1999; Chaix, 2004).

Recently, few commentators (see e.g., Bonnet, 2007) estimated that followers' identification with their rugby team was not affected by this new heterogeneity because of the naturalization process of representations operated by sporting commentators and analysts. Indeed, medias contribute to preserve a territorial ideology in order to maintain the ‘rugby des villages’ illusion which corresponds to another historical period and to the aspirations of the traditional followers.

The apparent contradiction that exists in the literature seems to be partly resolved by the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (ELM; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; see also Parker & Fink, 2008) which considers that not all viewers will be similarly affected by commentators' framing. The ELM states that cognitive evaluation is a key factor of attitudes modification and argues that information processing can either take a peripheral or a central way (Petty *et al.*, 1983). The peripheral way, which is more often used by less involved viewers, leads to attitudes that are easily influenced by sporting comments for instance. In opposition, the central way, which is more often used by viewers who are highly involved, leads to stable attitudes not easily modifiable. Therefore, we can think that moderately involved viewers such as *casual spectators* are likely to have attitudes which may be easily influenced by existing peripheral cues or frequently presented frames (see Parker & Fink, 2008). In opposition, highly identified and involved rugby fans coined *die-hard fans* are likely to have previously-formed attitudes, rooted in an extensive experience and knowledge

about the team (Wann *et al.*, 2001), and which are resistant to change.

The ELM framework is in line with the SIA's understanding of prototypes which are neither objective nor fixed, but rather a subjective representation of a category that depends on the social context as well as norms and consensus within one's ingroup (Turner *et al.*, 1987). As such, prototypes can be subjects of divergence between members of a group, according to their level of involvement and identification with it. Consequently, casual spectators and die-hard fans could differ in their perception of the local team as being prototypical of the superordinate category and then use different sources of identification to react to their team defeat.

More precisely, using a SIA perspective, and based on studies on the influence of the professionalism process in rugby (Augustin, 1999; Bonnet, 2007; Chaix, 2004) and on the ELM framework (Parker & Fink, 2008; Petty *et al.*, 1983), we believe that casual spectators could see their local rugby team as being particularly prototypical of the territorial identity (i.e., the superordinate category) and thus should use the traditional source of identification (i.e., team identification) to react to their team defeat, replicating North-American results on this topic (Bernache-Assollant, 2010; Wann, 2006). For die-hard fans, we argue that, because they possess strong and stable attitudes about their team not easily modifiable, based on their extensive experience and knowledge about it (e.g., in terms of team composition), they could claim a lower prototypicality for their local team. Consequently, and given the prescriptive power of the superordinate category (Wenzel *et al.*, 2007), they could be particularly incline to re-categorize themselves at a higher level of abstraction through the process of *superordinate Re-categorization*. Precisely, we believe that in this specific intergroup context, territorial identification can play a role on the reactions displayed by die-hard fans following their team defeat. Admittedly though, and given a dearth of cogent scientific information, those general predictions remain tentative in nature.

These relationships were tested using two independent samples of rugby followers, that is casual spectators (study 1) and die-hard fans (study 2).

## STUDY 1: CASUAL SPECTATORS

### METHOD

#### *Participants.*

Respondents were 153 physical education students enlisted in physical education *programs* at two French universities located in cities with a long rugby union history (first division rugby clubs). The average age of all respondents was 20.71 years ( $SD = 1.20$ ) and there were more men ( $N = 122$ ) than women ( $N = 31$ ).

On average, respondents physically attended 2 home games ( $SD = 3.01$ ) and watched 9.75 TV games ( $SD = 14.37$ ) of their respective local rugby team per year. Almost 71.71% of them spent on average less than €100 per year to attend games and they had been supporting their local rugby team for 4.44 years on average ( $SD = 4.79$ ).

### Procedure.

Several weeks before the testing session, students were asked to be attentive to the games of their local rugby team in relation to the partial fulfillment of course requirements. Data collection took place on Monday immediately following a defeat of the respective local rugby team. On arrival in the teaching class, students were told that they were participating in a class dealing with "attitude toward competitive sport". Only respondents who had seen the target game were asked to participate in the present study. The participants were told to write down the target game and the score of this game. All participants correctly identified the defeated team (i.e., their respective local team). Participants were informed that they could retire from the experiment at any point and could hand out a partially completed or blank questionnaire. The anonymous and confidential nature of the participation was also stressed through verbal and written instructions. Finally, informed consent was obtained prior to the fulfillment of the sociodemographic information and the completion of the scales described below. The procedure lasted approximately 10 minutes. Upon completion of the questionnaire packet, participants were debriefed and excused from the testing session. This methodology is akin to that already employed by Madrigal and Chen (2008).

**Measures.** Participants were asked to focus on the result of the match (i.e., defeat) before rating each dependent measure.

**Team identification.** Participants were asked to complete a French version of the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS, Wann & Branscombe, 1993; see Bernache-Assollant, Bouchet, & Lacassagne, 2007 for the French validation). The SSIS is a well-known instrument which has been used extensively (Wann et al., 2001), and which has demonstrated good reliability and validity in the French context on student samples (see e.g., Bernache-Assollant & Chantal, 2009). The SSIS comprises seven Likert-type scale items. Items' examples of the SSIS include, 'how important to you is it that the name of the local rugby team wins?' and 'to what extent do you perceive yourself as a fan of the name of the local rugby team?' All responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with lower scores indicating lower levels of identification and higher scores indicating higher identification. Consistent with previous studies, a principle components factor analysis on the seven items indicated a one-factor solution with an eigenvalue of 4.18 accounted for 59.71% of the total variance (loadings  $\geq .54$ ). The seven items of the SSIS were averaged to produce a team

identification score ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ). This mean of team identification was significantly below the mid-point of the scale (i.e., 4.00),  $t(152) = 8.98$ ,  $p < .001$ . Moreover, about 82% of the sample scored below the mid-point and none of them choose the upper score of 7. Based on this measure and the involvement scores, the participants couldn't be considered as *die-hard fans* but rather as *casual spectators*, moderately identified to their team (see Wann et al., 2001, for a more detailed discussion on this issue).

**Territorial identification.** Five items were used to measure respondents' territorial identification such as 'I identify myself with name of the inhabitant of the city', and 'Being name of the inhabitant of the city is an important part of whom I am'. The items selected to measure territorial identification in the present study have already been shown internally consistent and relevant in other contexts (see e.g., Jetten, Branscombe, & Spears, 2002; Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*disagree completely*) to 7 (*agree completely*). A principle component factor analysis<sup>2</sup> on the five items indicated a one-factor solution with an eigenvalue of 4.02 accounted for 80.4% of the total variance (loadings  $\geq .85$ ). The five items were averaged to produce a territorial identification measure (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ) ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ). The territorial identification mean was significantly below the mid-point of the scale (i.e., 4.00),  $t(152) = 5.23$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Boosting.** A single-item measure was used to assess participants desire to improve the status of the team (see Markman & Hirt, 2002): 'What is the probability that your name of the local rugby team win the French rugby championship this year?' Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *very unlikely* to 7 = *very likely*).

**Blasting.** Outgroup derogation was measured by one item asking participants to rate the extent to which the result of the match made them want to 'confront the opposition's fans' (see Crisp *et al.*, 2007 for a similar measure). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*disagree completely*) to 7 (*agree completely*).

**CORFing.** Three items in accordance with the three-items scale of Trail, Fink and Anderson (2003) were used to assess participants' distancing strategy: 'I don't want to support the name of the local rugby team anymore', 'I don't want to publicly show my attachment to the name of the local rugby team anymore (through team-derived object such as clothing...)', 'I want to move away from the name of the local rugby team'. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*disagree completely*) to 7 (*agree completely*). A principle component factor analysis on the three items indicated a one-factor solution with an eigenvalue of 2.31 accounted for 76.96% of the total

variance (loadings  $\geq .83$ ). The three items of the CORFing scale were averaged to produce a CORFing measure (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ).

**RESULTS**

**Correlational analysis.** The correlations, means, and standard deviations for all the scale scores are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations and correlations among team identification, territorial identification and identity management strategies for the casual spectators sample (study 1)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Team iden	---				
2. Terri. iden	.41***	---			
3. Boosting	.38***	.34***	---		
4. Blasting	.18*	.12	.23**	---	
5. CORFing	-.28***	-.16*	-.12	-.05	---
<i>M</i>	2.97	3.39	5.61	1.52	1.71
<i>SD</i>	1.25	1.84	1.10	0.60	1.36

Notes. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Team iden = team identification; Terri iden = territorial identification.

Team identification was significantly and positively related to territorial identification,  $r = .41, p < .001$ , boosting,  $r = .38, p < .001$  and blasting,  $r = .18, p < .05$ , and significantly and negatively related to CORFing,  $r = -.28, p < .001$ . Moreover, territorial identification was significantly and positively related to boosting,  $r = .34, p < .001$ , and negatively to CORFing,  $r = -.16, p < .05$  but not to blasting,  $r = .11, p = .19$ .

**Stepwise multiple regression.** These kind of analyses were performed to test our hypotheses because this method allows the selection of the "best" predictors from a set of potential predictors (see Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, Tatham, 2006). In a stepwise multiple regression analysis, the number of predictors to be selected and the order of entry are both decided by statistical criteria. Generally, the statistical criteria used is the R-Square value and the default value is 1. In this study, the analysis program found the highest related identification variables with the identity management strategy variable and the second identification variable is added only if its addition contributes to a positive increase in the R-Square value of the model (i.e., an incremental R-Square  $> .001$ ). For clarity purpose and given the exploratory nature of this research, we choose in the present study to display the two identification variables in the table 2, even if the addition of the second variable didn't significantly increase the R-Square value of the model. Team and territorial identification variables were regressed on each identity management strategy variables and, following the

recommendations of Aiken and West (1991), the identification variables were centred prior to be input into the analysis. Due to the high number of significance tests, a Bonferroni correction (see Abdi, 2007) was used such that alpha was set at  $p < 0.0083$ . The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Stepwise multiple regression predicting identity management strategies for the casual spectators sample (study 1)

	Step	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	Overall $R^2$
Boosting	1. Team iden.	.27**	.14***	
	2. Terri iden.	.23**	.04**	.18***
Blasting	1. Team iden	.17 <sup>t</sup>	.04 <sup>t</sup>	
	2. Terri iden	.06	.00	.04 <sup>t</sup>
CORFing	1. Team iden	-.25**	.07**	
	2. Terri iden	-.06	.00	.07**

Notes. <sup>t</sup> $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Team iden = team identification; Terri iden = territorial identification.

First, results showed that team and territorial identification accounted for 18% of variance in boosting (total  $R^2 = .18, p < .001$ ), 3.8 % in blasting (total  $R^2 = .038, p = .069$ ) and 7.6 % in CORFing (total  $R^2 = .076, p = .004$ ). Second, team identification tend to be the main antecedent of blasting ( $\beta = .17, p = .062$ ) and the main antecedent of boosting ( $\beta = .27, p = .001$ ) and CORFing ( $\beta = -.25, p = .006$ ). Finally, the introduction of the territorial identification variable accounted for a significant additional proportion of variance in boosting ( $\Delta R^2 = .04, p = .005$ ) but not in blasting ( $\Delta R^2 = .002, p = .62$ ) and CORFing ( $\Delta R^2 = .003, p = .52$ ).

**Brief discussion**

Together, the results of this investigation corroborate numerous studies on this topic conducted in the North-American context (Bernache-Assollant, 2010; Wann, 2006 for review; see also more recently Spinda, 2011; Ware & Kowalski, 2012). That is, according to the stepwise regression analysis, it appears that for the present sample of casual spectators, team identification represents a core variable to highlight the identity management strategy's choice (i.e., the highest related identification variable with the identity management strategy variable). As expected, the most identified spectators would be more associated with engaging themselves in offensive behaviors (particularly boosting) than the least identified spectators, who would, in contrast, privilege distancing strategies (i.e., CORFing) in order to cope with a defeat of their local rugby team. Furthermore, the territorial source

of identification never predicted the choice of any strategy, and only accounted for a significant additional proportion of variance in boosting.

To better track the role of these two kinds of identification sources, a second study was performed with a sample of highly involved and identified followers coined die-hard fans.

## STUDY 2: DIE-HARD FANS

### METHOD

#### Participants.

Respondents were 64 rugby fans of two first division rugby clubs (i.e., Top 14) of the French championship who all belonged to an official fan group. The average age of all respondents was 43.32 years ( $SD = 16.26$ ) and there were more men ( $N = 54$ ) than women ( $N = 10$ ).

On average, they physically attended 13 home games ( $M = 13.03$ ,  $SD = 3.01$ ) and watched 14 TV games ( $M = 13.93$ ,  $SD = 9.22$ ) of their respective local rugby team per year. Almost 65% of them spent on average between €100 and €500 per year to attend games and they had been supporting their favorite team for 20 years on average ( $M = 19.68$ ,  $SD = 19.50$ ).

#### Procedure.

The chairmen of the fans' groups were contacted by one of the researchers, who explained that the purpose of the study was to better understand rugby fans' behaviors. The questionnaires as well as a postage-paid reply envelope and a letter explaining the purpose of the study were mailed to the chairmen of the fans' groups who were asked to distribute them to their members.

A two page booklet entitled "rugby spectators survey" was given to the rugby fans along with verbal instructions of the chairmen as to its use with a particular emphasis on instructions regarding the rating scales described below. The instructions given to the chairmen also specified that they should ask the fans (a) to read instructions written on the first questionnaire sheet which ensured the anonymous and confidential nature of the survey and that there was no right or wrong answers, (b) to complete their questionnaires independently without chatting with other fans, and (c) to write down the target game and the score of this game on the top of the first questionnaire sheet. Informed consent forms were provided and completed.

Post research debriefing with each chairman revealed that questionnaires were mainly distributed during the collective bus trip to away games and in other sites of sociability such as the club headquarter often based in a bar.

All questionnaires were completed following a team loss. This methodology is akin to that already employed by Boen and collaborators (e.g., Boen et al., 2008).

**Measures.** In all respects, measures were identical to those of study 1. Results of principle component factor and reliability analysis for the multi-items measures are presented below.

**Team identification.** The variable was assessed with the French version of the SSIS used in study 1. A principle component factor analysis on the seven items indicated a two-factor solution with an eigenvalue of 3.11 and 1.19 accounted respectively for 44.48% and 17.01% of the total variance. The fourth item from the team identification scale ('during the season, how closely do you follow *name of the local rugby team* via any of the following: in person or on television; on the radio, television news or a newspaper; or the Internet?') appeared to have high positive factor loading on the second factor (i.e., .72) and relatively low negative factor loading on the first factor (i.e., -.39). The sixth item ('how much do you dislike *name of the local rugby team's* greatest rivals?') appeared to have both moderately high positive loadings on the first (i.e., .63) and the second factors (i.e., .58). Consequently, we decided to exclude these items from the analysis<sup>3</sup>. A principle component factor analysis on the five items indicated a one-factor solution with an eigenvalue of 2.65 accounted for 52.96% of the total variance (loadings  $\geq .60$ ). The five items of the team identification scale were averaged to produce a team identification measure ( $M = 6.00$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ ). The team identification mean was strongly and significantly above the mid-point of the scale (i.e., 4.00),  $t(63) = 11.31$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Moreover, about 94% of the sample scored above the mid-point and 22% of them choose the upper score of 7. Based on this measure and the involvement scores, the study 2 participants could be considered as *die-hard fans* (Wann et al., 2001).

**Territorial identification.** The variable was assessed with the same five items used in study 1. A principle components factor analysis<sup>4</sup> on the five items indicated a one-factor solution with an eigenvalue of 3.50 accounted for 70.01% of the total variance (loadings  $\geq .71$ ). The five items were averaged to produce a territorial identification measure ( $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ). The territorial identification mean was significantly above the mid-point of the scale (i.e., 4.00),  $t(63) = 3.51$ ,  $p = .0006$ .

**CORFing.** The variable was assessed with the same three items used in study 1. A principle component factor analysis on the three items indicated a one-factor solution with an eigenvalue of 1.77 accounted for 58.97% of the total variance (loadings  $\geq .72$ ). The three items of the CORFing scale were averaged to produce a CORFing measure (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ).

## RESULTS

**Correlational analysis.** The correlations, means, and standard deviations for all the scale scores are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Means, standard deviations and correlations among team identification, territorial identification and identity management strategies for the die-hard fans sample (study 2)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Team iden	---				
2. Terri. iden	.43***	---			
3. Boosting	.38***	.51***	---		
4. Blasting	.22 <sup>†</sup>	.41***	.26*	---	
5. CORFing	-.42***	-.10	-.23	-.05	---
<i>M</i>	6.00	4.62	4.19	1.40	1.42
<i>SD</i>	0.89	1.66	1.92	1.23	0.88

Notes. <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Team iden = team identification; Terri iden = territorial identification.

Team identification was significantly and positively related to territorial identification,  $r = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ , boosting,  $r = .38$ ,  $p < .001$  and marginally to blasting,  $r = .22$ ,  $p = .089$ , and significantly and negatively related to CORFing,  $r = -.42$ ,  $p < .001$ . Moreover, territorial identification was significantly and positively related to boosting,  $r = .51$ ,  $p < .001$ , and blasting,  $r = .40$ ,  $p < .001$  but not to CORFing,  $r = -.10$ ,  $p = .43$ .

**Stepwise multiple regression.** The results of these analyses are presented in Table 4. As in study 1, a Bonferroni correction was used such that alpha was set at  $p < 0.0083$ .

First, results showed that team and territorial identification accounted for 31% of variance in boosting (total  $R^2 = .31$ ,  $p < .001$ ), 17 % in blasting (total  $R^2 = .17$ ,  $p = .004$ ), and 18 % in CORFing (total  $R^2 = .18$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Second, team identification appeared to be the main antecedent of CORFing ( $\beta = -.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The introduction of the territorial identification variable did not account for a significant additional proportion of variance in CORFing ( $\Delta R^2 = .006$ ,  $p = .49$ ). Finally, contrary to study 1, territorial identification was the main antecedent of boosting ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and blasting ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $p = .005$ ), and the introduction of the team identification variable did not account for a significant additional proportion of variance (respectively,  $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ,  $p = .07$ , and  $\Delta R^2 = .006$ ,  $p = .52$ , for boosting and blasting).

**Table 4.** Stepwise multiple regression predicting identity management strategies for the die-hard fans sample (study 2)

	Step	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	Overall $R^2$
Boosting				
	1. Terri iden	.43***	.27***	
	2. Team iden	.21	.04	.31***
Blasting				
	1. Terri iden	.37**	.17**	
	2. Team iden	.08	.01	.17**
CORFing				
	1. Team iden	-.46***	.18***	
	2. Terri iden	.09	.01	.19**

Notes. <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Team iden = team identification; Terri iden = territorial identification.

**Brief discussion**

The results of this second study dealing with die-hard fans clearly showed a different pattern of variables underlying fans' reactions. More specifically, it appeared that team identification seems to be the best predictor of team loyalty strategies (i.e., CORFing) whereas territorial identification is the first predictor of offensive strategies (i.e., boosting and blasting). These effects, which highlight for the first time that two foci of identification can drive different kind of strategies (loyalty vs offensive), are commented in greater details below.

**General discussion**

About ten years after the professionalism process started in the French rugby union context, the traditional link between followers and their local rugby team is under question as teams seem unable to preserve the local identity anymore (Augustin, 1999; Chaix, 2004). Using a SIA framework (Haslam, 2004), the purpose of the present exploratory research was to compare the relationships between two foci of identification and three identity management strategies. These relationships were tested in two studies with two different samples of rugby followers, after a defeat of their local team.

In study 1, using a sample of casual spectators, we found that the traditional source of identification (i.e., team identification) is the best predictor of the three strategy's choices tested in this research and that the territorial source of identification never predicted the choice of any strategy. In study 2, using a sample of die-hard fans, we found that team identification was the best predictor of team loyalty strategy (i.e., CORFing) and territorial identification of offensive strategies (i.e., blasting and boosting).



Using a SIA perspective and based on studies on the influence of the professionalism process in rugby (Augustin, 1999; Bonnet, 2007; Chaix, 2004) and on the ELM framework (e.g., Parker & Fink, 2008; Petty et al., 1983), we argue that these results can be explained, at least partially, by the different perceptions of the team as being the prototype of the territorial identity between casual spectators and die hard fans. Because medias, and sporting comments in particular, contribute to preserve a territorial ideology in order to maintain the 'rugby des villages' illusion, the use of the team identification source to react to their team defeat may result from casual spectators' perception of their local team as still being the prototype of the territorial identity (i.e., a symbolic representation of the local identity). We feel that this result and this interpretation go in line with the work on the ELM which proposes that moderately involved viewers such as casual spectators possess flexible attitudes that are easily influenced by sporting comments. For die-hard fans, who are extremely identified to their team and involved in their activity and in accordance with the ELM, the perception of prototypicality of the team seems weak because they have previously-formed attitudes, rooted in an extensive experience and knowledge about their team (Wann et al., 2001), and which are resistant to change and particularly to media discourses. In line with this interpretation, the deviation of the team from the prototype could explain at least partially why die-hard fans use their territorial identification to react offensively to their team defeat. In other words, they re-categorize themselves at a higher level of abstraction through the process of *superordinate Re-categorization* (Wenzel et al., 2007). This relationship was not found for the team identification measure which means that this is not because fans are highly identified to their team that they want to boost its status and confront the outgroup fans. As a consequence, it appears that the team cannot be anymore considered as the main resource of active strategy to cope with a threat (see Sherman, Kinlas, Major, Kim, & Prenovost, 2007). Considering that each rugby confrontation provides the symbolic support of a local identity and exacerbates cleavages between cities (i.e., implying an intergroup context such as 'my city against the other cities'), and that the team does not represent as before this local identity, it seems consistent that die-hard fans believe that the team is not the proper source to react actively, particularly against outgroups. Nevertheless, despite the changes that occurred in regard to the qualitative link they had developed with their team (lost of territorial representation), the more the fans are highly identified to their team, the more they stick with it following a loss, perhaps because the local team still represents a central component of their identity (as confirmed by the highly identified score on the team identification scale; i.e. 6.00).

We consider that this study raises a number of valuable insights with respect to research on identity management strategies of sport followers. First, to the best of our knowledge, the present research represents the first attempt to take into account the link between a sport team,

territorial identity and followers' reactions to the defeat. More specifically, in a context of a recently professionalized sport, our results extend this field of research by showing the relevancy to take into account others sources of identification such as the territory to anticipate die-hard fans offensive reactions, even if they were all moderately to very highly identified to their local team (team identification scores range from 3 to 7). In others words, it is not because fans are very highly identified to their local team that it always represents the more accurate source of identification to enhance a social identity. Even if this idea has already been proposed in the past by authors such as Bernache-Assollant and collaborators (2007), it seems that it has not been empirically investigated before. For us, these results have two broad implications. For researchers, this underscores the importance of considering the specific context in which sport fanship takes place for future research and thus to go beyond the basic quantitative link with a team (i.e., team identification). Following this research, it seems that in the French rugby union context, die-hard fans develop a qualitative link with their local professional team which differs from that of die-hard fans of a university team in the North-American context. For practitioners, this highlights the fact that a sport team does not systematically represent a community and that sport teams should continuously work to develop and maintain this relationship. In this French context, this research suggests that this link is particularly questioned. Second, our findings strongly support that the terms spectators and fans can't be used interchangeably (Trail, Robinson et al., 2003; Wann et al., 2001). Thus, we cannot speak about followers as a homogeneous population as, besides differences in team involvement and identification levels, the source of identification in strategy mobilization seems different. We interpret this difference in the current research through the fact that die-hard fans, contrary to casual spectators, are more sensitive to the changes that touch their local team because it represents a central component of their social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

There are several limitations to our study, which will need to be addressed through further research. First, because the sample size in study 1 was much more larger than in study 2 (i.e., 153 participants vs 64 respectively), we cannot be sure that the differences obtained in this research are not partially due to this factor. Accordingly, future replications research should strive to employ more balanced and larger samples of fans recruited from different sport disciplines, competitive levels, and age groups in order to extend the validity of the present findings. A second limitation concerns the fact that we didn't measure directly the prototypicality of the team. Admittedly though, we cannot be entirely sure that the local rugby team has been seen as less prototypical of territorial identity by die-hard fans than by casual spectators. To answer this weakness, additional research should for instance be conducted using a validated tool to measure ingroup prototypicality (see Wenzel et al., 2007).

Third, it should be noted that there surely is a need to measure more strictly the different identity management strategies than in the present study, namely, via a single Likert-scale item for boosting and blasting. Consequently, it should be helpful to develop a valid measure of sport spectator identity management strategies. Finally, we examined the role of territorial identification in strategy's choice in regard to a specific context of professionalization process. Besides professionalization expansion, it could be interesting to take into account other processes such as merging or alliance processes. The work of Boen and collaborators (see e.g., Boen et al., 2008) which also used a SIA framework could be helpful in this way. For instance, would fans supporting a team engaged in a merging process still perceive their new team as being the prototype of the local identity? At present, it would be premature to make predictions, but this issue certainly worth additional research.

In closing, the present findings must be considered as preliminary evidences of correlational nature in a specific fanship context, which induce a need for further empirical replications. Nonetheless, it is our contentious that the territorial source of identification extends the scope for future research, which may also want to investigate followers' coping strategies in a context in which "the team is not really their team anymore" (Boen et al., 2008).

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