Many die-hard fans consider supporting their favorite team a part of who they are, which brings to light a very important psychological aspect of fandom: identity. The human brain searches constantly to answer the question “Who am I?” In this exploration of self, many turn to fandom. Sports offer people an institution to invest in. In fact, the “more opportunities the team gives you to establish an identity for yourself, the more firmly you anchor your support in it, the easier it is to answer the question “Who am I?” (Simons, 2013, pp. 110).

One of the reasons sports fans feel so invested in the game they are watching is mirror neurons. The same part of the brain activates when you see sports or play them, so when a fan is sitting in the stands, their brain acts as if they are actually the ones playing (Simons, 2013, pp. 65). The more familiar you become with an action through playing yourself or watching repeatedly, the more intense the mirroring becomes. This phenomenon is responsible for anticipation. This is directly a result of them mirroring the player. Mirror neurons involve a fan’s motor system. Since the brain thinks it’s performing the action being watched, fans can find themselves moving at times without conscious control of it. This accounts for why they stand up, jump onto chairs, or throw their hands up when something exciting happens, almost like a reflex (Simons, 2013, pp. 87).

Humans instinctually categorize people into groups they can easily understand; the in-group and the out-group. For sports fans, they categorize based on team logos and colors and group individuals into people that support their team and the opposition. Behaviors are then adjusted accordingly. Each person automatically favors members of the in-group and unconsciously discriminates against members of the out-group (Simons, 2013, pp. 231-2). Sports fans fiercely dislike fans of the opposing team even though it is only competition that turns the two groups of fans against each other.

In addition to the research, I spoke to some URI basketball fans about their experiences. They became fans in a variety of ways including involvement in the program, or attending the college. Although the team has gone through many difficult and long suffering seasons, they expressed that being a URI basketball fan means becoming very accustomed to losses and disappointments, but “that’s URI” and everybody said they could never give up on their team. Lastly, there was one resounding commonality among all the URI fans who I spoke with; an intense and undying hate for Providence College.

While I did gain extensive knowledge on sports fans, I found that my research was not just about the paper. It became more about the lived experience of the project. I gained a greater understanding of my world and the people that I was surrounded by at every basketball game as a Ramette. URI basketball is a truly meaningful part of their lives and I was able to share in their love. It was amazing to hear their stories and learn about them, but I also learned more about myself and that I, as a URI basketball fan, am a part of something so much greater than I could have ever imagined.