

A SCRUM OF THEIR OWN:  
WHY WOMEN PLAY RUGBY, AND HOW TEAM CULTURE  
AFFECTS PLAYER PARTICIPATION WITH THE AMERICAN  
UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

By

Erika Baumann

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# **Abstract**

Despite being known as aggressive or even violent, rugby is one of the fastest-growing women's sports at the collegiate level (U.S. Women's Rugby Foundation 2007). As a full-contact sport, rugby is extremely physical and has a high potential for injury; however, it is also well known for the sense of camaraderie that often develops among team members. Through the use of interviews of current players for the American University Women's Rugby Football Club (AUWRFC), this research examines what motivates college-aged women, diverse in body type, athletic ability, and athletic background, to begin playing rugby, and why many of them continue to play throughout their college careers. New players join for a variety of reasons, including wanting a challenge, staying fit, and making friends. The factors that motivate players to keep playing, despite the many obstacles female players face, are not only the mental and physical challenges presented by the game; more important is the network of relationships they form with their teammates. These bonds are reinforced through the team's culture, which includes its student-run leadership structure, the creation of "rookie classes" who learn the sport together, and a variety of longstanding social traditions that bring the team together as well as tie AUWRFC to other teams. The sense of community formed on the team extends well beyond the realm of just rugby and into other elements of their lives as well.

## **Dedication**

To my amazing parents, who spent four years worrying that rugby would affect my schoolwork.

And to AUWRFC – you are by far the coolest group of ladies that I've ever had the privilege to call my team.

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# Introduction

## Rugby: The Sport

Rugby is a sport played by five million people in 117 countries, and the number of players around the world has grown by 19% since 2007 alone (International Rugby Board 2012). Despite being much beloved globally, it is a sport that is still relatively unknown in the United States. Rugby originated in Rugby, England in the early 1800's with a legend that a student, William Webb Ellis, broke the rules of a different game by picking the ball up and carrying it down the field. In the US, the first rugby game was played in 1874, and formal rugby organizations were created shortly after that. However, due to the rising popularity of American football, American rugby didn't gain national recognition until the U.S. national team won when rugby was included in the world Olympics in 1920 and 1924 (USA Rugby 2013).

Rugby is similar to American football in that players are allowed to kick, pass, or run with the oval-shaped ball down the field. The defense uses tackles to prevent the offense from progressing down the field, and a team can score both when they touch the ball down in the "try zone" and when a kick goes through the uprights. Unlike football, play is continuous (without stops or time-outs), passes can only be made backward, and the only protective gear typically worn by players is a mouth guard. Penalties and out-of-bounds calls are dealt with by "scrums" and "lineouts", respectively. Free kicks are also awarded for more severe penalties. For more information regarding the play of the game, please see Appendix I.

Because rugby is full contact, it demands a high level of strength, speed, endurance, agility, and aggression. Historically, men have dominated the sport for most of its existence;

researchers Carle and Nauright argue that in the past rugby has reinforced traditional gender stereotypes, with men having exclusive opportunities to participate in sport, and thus further associate “masculinity” with the previously mentioned traits of strength, athleticism, and aggression. They state that “the relationship between rugby and masculinity was passed generationally between fathers and sons, and rugby participation became synonymous with becoming a man” (Carle and Nauright 1999:130).

### Women in Rugby

While American men have been participating in rugby competitively since the early 1900’s, women have only done so since 1985 – and even then, they were not allowed to wear the official USA rugby logo on their uniforms until several years later (USA Rugby 2013). Notably, unlike almost every other sport, the rules for women’s rugby teams are exactly the same as those followed by men’s teams, no matter the level of play. While this would seem to level the playing field for teams regardless of their gender, female players have faced and continue to face unique challenges both in the rugby world and in the larger society.

As mentioned previously, rugby has a long history of being exclusively male-dominated and framed as a hyper-masculine sport. Women who play rugby, therefore, are seen by society to undergo “‘masculinization’ through the display of muscle, active physicality, aggression, and competition, attributes traditionally associated with masculinity and sport” (Howe 1999:235). Related to this perception of women athletes as “manly” is society’s attack on female rugby player’s perceived sexual orientation. Women have traditionally been discouraged from playing male-dominated sports, and “society challenges

the heterosexuality of women athletes as a method of controlling women in sport... forc[ing] women athletes to watch themselves” (Shockley 2005:160).

In addition to society’s perception of female players, rugby’s reputation of intense physical aggression is not unfounded: overall, 41.5% of female players report having had a past rugby injury that required medical attention or required them to temporarily stop playing. Among these, several of the most prevalent injuries have the potential to be quite serious: sprains, fractures, tears, contusions, and concussions (Comstock and Fields 2005).

### American University Rugby

The American University Women’s Rugby Football Club (AUWRFC) was founded in 1996 in Washington D.C., and currently plays at the Division II level in the regional Potomac Rugby Union, a subdivision of the Mid-Atlantic Rugby Football Union. While membership varies season to season based on interest, availability, and injuries, the team typically has approximately 30 eligible players. While the team accepts American University (AU) students of all levels and ages, the vast majority of current AUWRFC players (all but one in the 2012-2013 school year) are undergraduate students aged 18 to 22. As is the case with women’s rugby across the country (Shockley 2005:153), most AUWRFC players only first began playing rugby upon arriving at AU, although many had participated in a variety of other sports before coming to college. This fact is even used as a means of recruitment for the team; AUWRFC’s student-run blog plainly states, “No experience is necessary.”

Structurally, AUWRFC is almost entirely student-led and has a leadership system in the form of an Executive Board; major positions on the board include the President, who

oversees all administrative affairs of the team, the Secretary, who is responsible for team paperwork, meeting minutes, and registration, the Treasurer, who manages team finances, the Match Secretary, who arranges practices, games, and transportation, and the Captains, who lead the team on the field but still have say in administrative matters. Other Board positions include the Public Relations chair, the Equipment chair, the Social/Recruitment chair, and the Fundraising chair.

As with all other club sports registered with American University, financial support comes from several different sources and fundraising is a vital part of AUWRFC's budget. The University will contribute to the team's finances, but the team itself must raise at least 75% of the amount it receives from the school through independent fundraising events both on- and off-campus, as well as from donations from family, friends, or other supporters. Additionally, the team collects dues from each member, which in the 2012-2013 year totaled \$130. These dues go towards offsetting both official team expenses such as transportation and tournament registration, as well as informal expenses like weekly team dinners.

During rugby season, which runs roughly from September to mid November in the Fall and mid-February to late May in the Spring, AUWRFC practices on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings from 5pm-7pm. Due to the lack of available practice space in an urban environment like Washington D.C., the team primarily practices on a large traffic island several blocks from AU's main campus. Rugby games, called matches, are held on Saturdays, with a few tournaments each year taking place over the course of an entire weekend. AUWRFC generally plays other college and local women's teams in the DC metropolitan area, but occasionally travels several hours in a day to play teams in Virginia or Pennsylvania.



## **Research Questions**

Women who decide to play rugby face not only a high possibility of injury, but also discrimination and a lack of respect from men's teams, and society's stereotypes of women athletes who are not traditionally "feminine" enough. In addition, college club teams such as AUWRFC may face further challenges by the lack of support they receive from their school. Despite these challenges, women's rugby is one of the fastest growing sports, both in the U.S. and worldwide (U.S. Women's Rugby Foundation 2007). .

This research examines the following questions: What sociological factors influence an individual's decision to join a rugby team in college? What characteristics of the team, or of rugby culture as a whole, encourage members to continue playing for multiple years?

# Literature Review

## Societal Perceptions of Female Ruggers

While several studies inadvertently address how a larger society views female rugby players, P. David Howe (2003) directly confronts these stereotypes in his ethnography of a Welsh women's team. Calling rugby "masculinizing" in that its physically demanding nature goes against traditional concepts of femininity, Howe (2003) states that the first challenge women face in playing rugby is society's perception of them as female athletes. Players do not have distinct uniforms that separate them from men's teams, as other sports often do; thus, "the look of the game of women's rugby then is felt to be as important as the physical nature of the matches" (Howe 2003:236). The researcher argues that this combination of rugby's "look" and its physicality leads society to label female players as lesbians, to the degree that the team being studied often worried about the team's image when trying to recruit new members (Howe 2003). Another issue women's team face from society is gender-based discrimination relating to supposed ability – because women have developed a different style of play from men, it is assumed that they are not as skilled. This assumption affects the level of social respect given to female players, as one of Howe's interviewees addresses: "The guys get all of the headlines and praise. Our game... is not seen as worthy of attention" (Howe 2003:239).

## Female Player's Perceptions

In a study conducted by Giovanna Follo (2010), female rugby players and martial artists were interviewed about their experiences with their respective contact sport. Recognizing that full-contact sports differ from what society considers gender-appropriate

for women, the study focused on the variable of age and how that affected women's perceptions of femininity, body image, and self-esteem (Follo 2010). Results from the older group of women, who were over the age of 40 and exclusively martial artists, reported that although women first joined for a variety of reasons, they all enjoyed the physicality of the sport, felt more empowered, and noted various physical and mental benefits from participating (Follo 2010). Amongst the younger women, the martial artists again had a variety of reasons for joining; on the other hand, the rugby players largely joined because of friends who played. The younger women also noted similar positive mental and physical effects from playing their sports as those of the older women (Follo 2010). Both groups, Follo noted, used "beauty norm terminology" to describe their body types, and while athletically may have been pleased with their strength or size, were overall not entirely pleased with their bodies. Follo also notes that the older group of women also "compared their older bodies to their younger bodies" (Follo 2010:290).

A participant observation study by Jessica Hudson (2010) of a women's rugby team at an English university analyzes how players challenge the traditional concept of femininity. Contrasting with the ideal that feminine equates to passive, weak, and inferior to masculinity, Hudson points out: "When women play rugby, they contradict the idea that all females are necessarily feminine; instead, they are strong, active predators" (Hudson 2010:251). Players' statements clearly acknowledge the social bias female ruggers face, being called "deviant" and "butch", often not having their families or friends' support in playing, and even being the butt of derogatory jokes. On the other hand, they also highly value the fact that they play rugby and can survive in such a tough, demanding sport. The research describes players who take great pride in their ability to tackle the opposition, as

well as show off and compare not only their muscles but also their variety of impressive bruises and other assorted injuries from games (Hudson 2010). Through her observations, Hudson concludes that female rugby players do not necessarily reject the notion of femininity, but rather re-shape their ideas about the concept. Playing rugby is therefore not seen as a masculine activity, but “reinforces what being a tough woman is all about”. Players also acknowledge that the sport itself may not be socially seen as “feminine” but that off the field they can be more traditionally feminine if they so choose (Hudson 2010).

### Reasons for Playing

In the book *Punch!: Why Women Participate in Violent Sports* (Lawler 2002), rugby is mentioned occasionally in the broader context of contact sports, which also include martial arts, ice hockey, American football, and boxing. Because Lawler searches for the overarching themes between these sports, the motives she explores for women playing “violent” sports tend to focus on individual reasons and factors. Interviews with female rugby players reveal that women originally started playing for a variety of reasons: one woman was “set up” with a male rugby player by her mother, which encouraged her to play herself. Others cite that it makes them feel more empowered, still others enjoy the fitness aspect and the physical challenges and rewards rugby presents. One player even stated, “I love the complete, whole body tiredness after a game, the feeling that I am completely spent. I like how people look at me when I tell them I play. It’s a point of pride for me” (Lawler 2002:42). Rugby’s social aspect is also very briefly mentioned as a reason why players love the sport so much – one woman explains how the camaraderie forged on the pitch extends to a vast international network of players (Lawler 2002).

Sarah Fields and Dawn Comstock's 2008 survey of female rugby players examines why American women continue to play rugby despite the high risk of injury the sport presents. Responses to the open-ended question ["briefly describe why you play rugby"] fit into what the researchers divided into four major categories (Fields and Comstock 2008). First, women appreciate the physical and intellectual challenges the contact sport and its intricate rules present, along with the fact that that game is simply fun to play. Secondly, respondents cite the aggressiveness of the game, and the fact that it provides an excellent outlet for aggression or stress (Fields and Comstock 2008). Women also overwhelmingly credit the social aspects of the game as a reason they continue to play; 85.8% of respondents mentioned having friends on the team, as well as the sense of camaraderie and community that players find as a member of their team. These bonds are largely developed at social functions and events outside of the game itself (Fields and Comstock 2008). Lastly, more than three quarters of women surveyed cited personal improvements as a reason to play. This encompasses personal fitness improvements and goals, an increase in self-confidence, and the opportunity to be good at something regardless of body type or previous experience. The researchers comment, "Women appear to gain a confidence, toughness, and sense of self from the sport" (Fields and Comstock 2008).

### Rugby Culture

A 1999 study by Alison Carle and John Nauright, which analyzed the culture surrounding an Australian women's rugby team, focused largely on the challenges female rugby players face. Throughout the study, obstacles such as discrimination and social stigma are mentioned. In addition, hostile attitudes from the same rugby club's men's team

toward the women's team are explored. Despite these challenges [or perhaps, to some degree, because of them], interviews with players reveal that close bonds are formed between teammates and that they often spend time socializing outside of rugby-related activities. One player explains: "When you are out on the field you are kind of putting your body in the hands of someone else... I think a real trust forms, and I think that's part of the reason friendships are so intense" (Carle and Nauright 1999:135). This particular club has a function room, an athletic trainer's room, a bar, and a dance floor; in addition to events held at the clubhouse after every home game, events are also held at local pubs. Respondents acknowledged the many challenges they faced developing as a sport, but felt that the benefits from playing far outweighed the negatives (Carle and Nauright 1999).

Megan Taylor Shockley's 2005 study examines how rugby culture on women's teams in the American South creates a direct contrast with the idea of "southern womanhood" or the "southern belle". Many survey respondents credit learning the rules of the game in adulthood as a powerful means of creating "a climate of friendship and informality that bonds teammates more than other sports" (Shockley 2005). Players must also trust that their teammates will physically protect them in sometimes-risky situations in the game. Several players described rugby as a "sorority", which juxtaposes the traditional southern belle's main social network with their own, independent "sisterhood" (Shockley 2005:157). Players also cited their rugby team's incredibly accepting community as a reason to be so devoted to it; all body types are needed for the game itself, and women's rugby as a whole has traditionally been more accepting of all sexual orientations than other organizations. One respondent commented on the idea of southern femininity, stating that rugby "helped me in realizing that prescribed gender values were ridiculous" (Shockley

2005:158). However, the researcher notes that these factors have also contributed to society's stereotype of female rugby players as butch or lesbians, a stereotype that most players appeared to understand. Overall, though, players often noted that rugby was not just a sport but became an important part of their lives; similarly, the author notes that rugby culture is gradually "redefining women's athletics" (Shockley 2005:166).

### Gaps in Literature

On the topic of women's rugby as a whole, the current literature is not very extensive and tends to focus on one specific aspect of it, such as gender roles, body image, the femininity/masculinity binary, stereotypes, and challenges female players face. Of the works that focus on larger themes in women's rugby, many of them have been conducted outside of the US, often in places where rugby is a far more popular sport than it is in America. Both of the studies conducted in the US, those of Fields and Comstock in 2008, and of Shockley in 2005, were completed by the wide distribution of a survey to players from many teams in various states and at various levels of play.

This project focused the study of rugby culture on a single American team, which allowed respondents to consider specific personal experiences with their team as opposed to making generalized statements about being on any rugby team. Though its data collection is not as wide reaching as the other studies, this research used interviews to obtain more in-depth responses about women's rugby culture at the college level by analyzing the social dynamics of the American University team. Interview topics will focus on their own and others perceptions of the sport, as well as specific team traditions, events, and structures that affect interpersonal relationships on the team.

# Theoretical Framework

## Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel's theory of Social Identity defines a person's social identity as the "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group...together with the value and emotional significance attached to that group" (Tajfel 1978:63). While accepting that a fuller view of identity is much more complex than just this, the theory explores the role that group membership plays in a person's sense of self. According to Social Identity Theory, membership in a group is dependent on the recognition of different group in society through a process called social categorization, which Tajfel calls "the ordering of the social environment in terms of groupings of persons which makes sense to the individual" (Tajfel 1978:61). This process of social categorization allows people to orient and define themselves within a society, as groups "are usually associated with positive or negative evaluations" (Tajfel 1978:62).

When one becomes a part of a group, it becomes what is widely known in social psychology as an "in-group" for that individual; those not belonging to that in-group are considered the "out-group". Because society is divided into so many groups, Tajfel's theory asserts that group differentiation plays a vital part in the forming of social identity: "The characteristics of one's group as a whole achieve most of their significance in relation to perceived differences from other groups and the value connotation of those differences" (Tajfel 1978:66).

This theory heavily influenced the creation of the study's interview guide. Questions relating to players' views on the team social dynamics were created to determine what "value and emotional significance" the team had for individual members. This included



information such as time spent with teammates outside of official rugby functions, their motivations for joining the team and continuing to play, and what factors kept them from quitting if they had ever considered it. Several questions directly addressed identity within the context of team membership by asking respondents to reflect on their own and others' perceptions of themselves since deciding to play. Additionally, the concept of group differentiation shaped multi-layered questions that ask interviewees to both compare rugby to other sports or activities, and AUWRFC to other rugby teams.

Tajfel's theory also states that being a member of a group must "have some contribution to the positive aspects of [one's] social identity, i.e. those aspects of it from which he derives some satisfaction" (Tajfel 1978:64); thus, several interview questions focused on the benefits members perceived themselves to be receiving from being an active part of AUWRFC.

### Primary Groups

In the broadest sense, Charles Horton Cooley's concept of primary groups is that of "intimate association" that leads to "a certain fusion of individualities in a common whole, so that one's very self... is the common life and purpose of the group" (Cooley 1962:23). For children, primary groups are first found within the family unit, and then in the context of the neighborhood or school. However, within a larger society one can find primary groups outside of the family in the form of close social clubs, friend groups, or other organizations. People falling outside of an individual's primary groups, such as co-workers or casual acquaintances, would be considered a secondary group. (Cooley 1962). Groups are primary in that they are the "earliest and most complete experience of social unity" (Cooley

1962:26). Often, when a person uses the generalizing term “we” referring to the actions or attitudes of a group larger than just themselves, they are describing membership in a primary group.

There are five main characteristics of primary groups: “face to face association, unspecified nature of associations, relative permanence, a small number of persons involved, and relative intimacy of participants” (Delaney and Madigan 2009:79). Again, questions within the interview guide were specifically geared to address the concept of the AU rugby team as a primary group: respondents were asked about the nature and frequency of team events, activities, and behaviors, as well as their feelings towards their teammates, which many subjects described as that of close friendship.

This concept also proposes that because of primary group’s importance to the individuals in it, primary groups are a major source of people’s socialization: “Life in the primary groups gives rise to social ideals” (Cooley 1962:32). Cooley states that families and other primary groups are the main influence in shaping people’s attitudes and perspectives on the world, because the intimate relationships between members of the group foster a sense of empathy and understanding of other’s thoughts and feelings (Cooley 1962). This concept was illustrated in the findings of this study, as many respondents reported feeling an overall sense of inclusion and acceptance – AUWRFC’s social ideals - among their teammates regardless of everyone’s differences.

The interview guide questions were geared to gauge the strength and closeness individuals perceived in their relationships with others on the team, and thus establish the presence of intimacy necessary for a primary group to form. The overall results overwhelmingly confirmed the idea of AUWRFC as a primary group for members.

# Methodology

## Research Design

Unlike related studies, which have used written surveys to gather information on a much larger number of subjects, this research will use in-depth, semi-structured interviews with current members of the American University Women's Rugby Football Club to answer its two core questions: namely, why women play rugby and what aspects of the team's culture encourage members to keep playing for multiple years. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher identifies "specific topics to be covered... but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply" (Bryman 2012:471). This research method was chosen due to the researcher's access to the population being studied, and as a means to obtain more specific, detailed information on the topics being studied.

## Sampling and Chronology

In early February, the researcher sent out a brief online survey to the team to gather basic demographic information: players' year, race, and the number of seasons they have played with AUWRFC. This was used to determine how the population should be sampled. Because the study focused on the continued involvement of players with AUWRFC, sampling was first stratified based on the number of seasons a player has been a member of the team. Players were grouped as having played for one to two seasons [new players who have just recently joined], three to four seasons [players who have been on the team for more than one year], and five or more seasons [players who have been a part of the team for more than two years].

In mid-February, the complete team roster was finalized: 43% of players have played one to two seasons, 23% have played for three to four seasons, and 33% had played for five or more seasons. These categories were roughly proportionally represented among interview subjects: four interviewees have played for one to two seasons, two have played for three to four seasons, and four have played for five or more seasons. Due to time constraints, the study was limited to a total of ten interviews.

As a current member of AUWRFC, the researcher has previous knowledge of the team dynamics and team members themselves; using this information, subjects were purposefully selected from the three given categories of rugby experience. Purposeful selection is a method of sampling in which a researcher would “select [a] sample on the basis of [their] own knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of [their] research aims” (Babbie 1992:230). In this case, purposeful selection was used to choose interview subjects who bring with them a variety of different experiences and backgrounds.

Interviews were conducted in March and April on American University’s campus. Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes; in addition to the notes taken by the researcher, interviews were recorded and then partially transcribed for the purpose of coding. Coding categories were developed from the major themes derived from interviewees’ responses, which generally followed the topics of each section of the interview: the players’ introductions to rugby, their perceptions of team dynamics, and their perceptions of themselves since playing rugby. Transcription also allowed the researcher to be “highly alert to what is being said” (Bryman 2012:482) as opposed to focusing entirely on note taking.

### Strengths

Interviews present many strengths in research. They allow a researcher to directly ask subjects about topics that may be difficult to observe, such as emotions, opinions, and perceptions. Because a researcher is directly asking questions, subjects' reactions can also be observed, in addition to recording what they are saying. A semi-structured format allows the researcher to cover a wide range of topics in one interview, the ability to ask follow up-questions, and the ability to have a subject elaborate on an answer (Bryman 2012).

Because the researcher has a background with the organization being studied, there are advantages in this being what Jeffrey Reimer calls "opportunistic research". He states, "They *know* rather than *know about* their area of study" (Reimer 1977:469). Benefits of this type of study include access to the group, knowledge of the group's vocabulary and symbolic meanings, and a previously established trust with group members. The researcher's background may also allow for a more accurate interpretation of the data (Reimer 1977).

### Weaknesses

Interviews do not allow for situational subject observation, and thus exclude any situational subject behaviors relevant to the topic being studied. As with other survey or interview tools, they are inflexible in the sense that it may be difficult to change the focus of the study should new variables appear during the course of the research. Also, just the fact that a researcher is studying a certain topic may affect respondents' answers to questions concerning that topic, especially when attitudes or perceptions are being studied (Babbie

1992). As stated by Babbie, “Survey research is generally weak on validity and strong on reliability” (Babbie 1992:279).

Opportunistic research also has several drawbacks. Researchers may “become emotionally involved with the members being studied, to the point that one’s objectivity may be affected” (Reimer 1997:474). Another major issue with this type of study is that the researcher’s individual knowledge and experience make the study difficult to replicate, as other possible researchers may not possess the same knowledge or experience. This, however, would not be as much of an issue if there were more opportunistic studies being conducted (Reimer 1997).

#### Ethics and Subject Protection

As with any research, this study did have ethical considerations. The researcher completed the National Institute of Health’s “Protecting Human Research Participants” training (see Appendix 2) and was informed that the study did not require approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The researcher initially contacted interviewees via an email that explained the purpose of the study and the subjects that interview questions (see Appendix 3) would cover. Participants voluntarily set up an interview time with the researcher, during which they were presented with an informed consent form to complete before the interview began; this form also contained a separate consent to voluntarily have the interview recorded (see Appendix 4). Subjects were asked to provide their names and basic demographic information, but were informed that all of their responses would remain confidential; they were also informed that they could skip any question or withdraw from the interview at any time. The risk to

subjects for participating in the study was minimal, and interviewees were given the researcher's contact information should they have any further questions or issues following the interview. While participants personally did not benefit from participating in the study, the research they contributed to may foster a better understanding of women in full-contact sports.

## Results

Results were drawn from ten interviews; four subjects had played for two seasons, two had played for three to four seasons, and four had played for five or more seasons, representing a wide range of experiences with AUWRFC. Several prominent response themes emerged in regard to the formation of community and culture within the group: namely, the importance of team tradition and leadership structure, and the idea of respect, support, and acceptance both on and off of the playing field.

### Introduction to Rugby

All of the respondents reported becoming a part of the team their freshman year, the majority of them joined almost immediately upon arriving at American University. Several had had previous exposure to the game through their high schools or friend groups, had known that they wanted to join a rugby team upon going to college, and actively sought out information on the team. The others had heard about the team through one of the club's various recruitment campaigns, which included tabling at new student orientations, posting flyers in student dorms, hosting information sessions during the first week of classes, and posting on Today@AU, American University's daily campus events email.

Subjects often cited multiple reasons for why they originally wanted to play, including wanting to stay fit, trying out and learning a brand new sport, and, most importantly, playing as a way to meet people. About half of the players interviewed specifically mentioned that having played on sports teams in high school, they were looking for a similar team environment to for their college career. Only one respondent did not cite any of these reasons for her original motivation to play; instead, she initially only reluctantly



showed up to rugby events at the request of her friend, who was very interested in playing. Ironically, she mentioned, her friend did not continue playing that season, but she herself was so drawn in and immediately “felt like part of the team”, that she decided to stick with it.

Other respondents echoed this sentiment, citing the personal relationships they formed with team members as the most important factor in their decision to continue playing rugby. One respondent mentioned the immediate sense of inclusion she felt joining the team; another quickly found that the team felt “like a family”. Several stated that joining the team “helped with [their] transition to college”, and that the team offered the chance to get to know older students, who could be turned to for advice or guidance. Almost all players interviewed stated that their favorite part of being on the rugby team was the friendships and strong social bonding it provided them.

Despite individuals’ positive experience with the team, others’ reactions to their playing varied greatly in type and intensity. All those interviewed reported that more than anything, their friends and peers simply did not know much about rugby or operated on a limited, stereotypical view of the sport. While not necessarily getting negative responses from peers, subjects would get reactions such as, “You play rugby? You must be so tough,” or “I thought you were too small to play rugby.” Reactions from parents on their daughters playing rugby, however, in general were decidedly more negative. Several players said that playing rugby caused some degree of contention or disagreements with at least one of their parents, all of whom expressed serious concern on the issue of physical safety when playing. Some parents even took more extreme measures: one player in her second season with AUWRFC says her parents want her to let them know the hospital closest to every game, as

well as call after every game to make sure she is still okay; another player, also in her second season, says her mother sent her pictures or newspaper articles of people who had been “beat up” while playing rugby.

Despite a widespread lack of knowledge about rugby and the strong familial backlash many players face when joining, it seems that the positives players feel that they gain from playing and being a part of the team outweigh the challenges it presents.

### Team Dynamics

Rugby is an incredibly demanding sport, and this fact was reflected in respondent’s answers; many of them cite this as one of the reasons they love rugby so much. As one player described it, rugby’s appeal lies in the fact that it is “multifaceted, and requires lots of skill sets”. Unlike other sports that the subjects have played, many discussed the physical challenges of getting in shape and acquiring new athletic skills, but also in the mental challenge of learning a new game with a complex set of rules. Because most AUWRFC players have never played rugby before coming to college, they learn with other new players as the season progresses; however, rather than this inexperience being a hindrance for the team, it is widely seen as one of its strengths. Several subjects talked about how part of rugby’s appeal lies with the “accessibility” that comes from a new group of players learning the game together. This common ground of learning together also hints at some of the deeper social bonds that form among teammates.

Players overwhelmingly cite the social aspect of rugby as their favorite part of team participation. Many respondents talked about the team’s camaraderie and the numerous friendships they have with fellow teammates. The sport’s physicality appears to

complement the social aspects of being on the team; several interviewees felt that because one is so often dependent on her teammates to protect her physical safety during a game [such as in rucks or lineouts] that players build a mutual trust so strong that it is not just applicable to the game. One subject expressed her confidence that her teammates would support her both “on the pitch and off”.

In addition to the trust stemming from games, the social structure of the team also adds to the sense of community on it. As an almost entirely student-run organization, management of the team requires a large investment of time and effort by many team members to keep the team running and well. All of those interviewed except one currently held a leadership position, had held a leadership position in the past, or expressed that they would like to in the future. Those who had experienced being on the team’s leadership universally commented that it not only let them get to know some of their teammates better, but it allowed them to see the “inner workings” of the team. Leadership finds solutions for any challenges the team faces, and sees firsthand all of the work that it really takes to keep the team going. According to one respondent, being on the Executive Board “adds another level” of commitment to the AU team. Interestingly, one senior member who had held several leadership positions also specifically mentioned the numerous “real world skills” she had gained from her team responsibilities, such as budgeting, peer management, confrontation, and conflict resolution. Her statement highlighted benefits not limited to the social realm, but of practical, necessary skills that can be applied to other areas of her life.

However, it was noted that leadership was not just responsible for the administrative well being of the team, like budgets, paperwork, and finding a new coach for next fall following the current coach’s recent resignation. An emotional element was touched upon

by several respondents, one stating that the E-Board is also concerned with “team feelings” – attempting to resolve or mediate individual or interpersonal emotional issues among team members. One senior also talked about her leadership position with a pay-it-forward perspective that was echoed by several other older players:

I feel like you take a lot from rugby in the first two years... You're learning, and you're growing, because you have the leadership of these older girls. And once you are that leader on the team, it's your turn to give back. That's my favorite part about rugby right now, is being able to give back, finally.

This statement and similar ones by older members of the team emphasize the importance of the leadership not just in an official sense, but also in giving new players the positive and reliable presence of older mentors. Another senior, reflecting upon her first season with the team as a freshman, said that the older leadership on the team in the past provided role models for her to strive to look up to, both socially and athletically.

While team leadership serves as an integral part of the structure of the team, it is not the only division that contributes to the formation of deep social bonds on the team. As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of players joining AUWRFC has never played rugby before and thus learns as the season progresses. This was described as the “rookie class system”, where each season’s brand new players are grouped into their own “rookie class”. Several players mentioned that some of their closest friends on the team are from their rookie class, reinforcing the concept that the simple act of learning to play such a challenging, physical sport together can foster a sense of camaraderie. In addition, many new rookies in the same rookie class are freshman who live close to each other in on-campus dorms, providing players with further opportunities to interact.

## Team Traditions

As well as being placed in the same rookie class, new players are brought together through AUWRFC's elaborate system of traditions, many of which focus on rookies. Described as "the rookie calendar", these traditions span the entire time of the fall or spring semester and involve rookies participating in activities outside of rugby-centered events like practices and matches.

The majority of traditions surrounding new players revolve around a series of projects and tasks that rookies must complete as a group to eventually be initiated onto the team as "returners", or players who are a part of the team for multiple seasons. Respondents described a variety of these projects: usually the first to occur in a semester is that of "returner facts". Rookies are given a list of one random, often ridiculous, trivia item about each returner. Over the course of a couple weeks, using only yes or no questions, the rookies must guess what fact belongs to what returner; once they have done this, they perform skits of each fact for the rest of the team. This is one of several team traditions that not only promotes teamwork among the incoming rookie class, but also allows them to get to know the rest of the team better. Returning players report intentionally not being straightforward in answering rookies' questions as a means to prolong conversations.

Rookies are also given a set of "rookie projects" to complete throughout the course of the semester, which typically include creating short, silly poems and drawings about the team, making a mixed music CD with one song representing every AUWRFC player, composing their own rugby-themed song, and traveling to "Rugby Road" in a neighboring city and taking a rookie class picture underneath the street sign. These projects are presented

to the rest of the team on “Rookie Day”, which is when the rookies become recognized as returners. Rookie Day also includes a rookie scavenger hunt across different parts of D.C.

Especially aware of being in a college environment, several team members stressed that the traditions surrounding new players were *not* hazing; they emphasized the comical and lighthearted nature of all of the tasks assigned, and that rookies were not pressured into doing anything they did not want to. Many players specifically stated that the main purpose of rookie projects was to foster friendships among the group of new players as well as make the new players feel included on the team as a whole.

This idea of traditions used to create and reinforce social bonds between rookies and returners is strengthened with the team tradition of Bigs and Littles, a tradition that was mentioned by almost all of the respondents. Similar to other college mentorship systems, most notably within many fraternities and sororities, a returning player or “Big” is paired as a mentor for a new player or “Little”. Several players – from both the role of both Big and Little – said that this was a relationship that helped cement their ties to the team, providing guidance and advice not only with learning rugby but with other aspects of their lives outside of the game. One player even called it “a community within a community.”

While many of AUWRFC’s traditions focus on the inclusion of new players, other traditions have wider-reaching impacts than just the new players. Homemade team dinners occur once a week, almost always on Friday nights before Saturday’s game. As one player stated of team social events, ‘It’s good for a team to just be completely ridiculous with each other.’ This tradition also fits in with the team’s 24-hour rule, preventing any drug or alcohol consumption 24 hours before a game; thus team dinners not only promote team social events but also encourage players to follow the team’s substance-free policy.

Mealtimes traditions are also seen in less formal ways, too – several players mentioned that it is common for many team members to get dinner together in the AU cafeteria after evening practices during the week.

In addition to traditions within AUWRFC, there appear to be wider-reaching traditions followed by the broader rugby community. Almost all of the players included “socials” among team traditions. Often described as “the third half”, socials occur after a rugby match, when both teams come together to eat, drink, hang out, and sing “shock-and-awe-inducing” rugby-themed drinking songs. Players described these gatherings as unique among sporting events in that AUWRFC can “celebrate the game with the other team” regardless of the outcome, and “put aside any animosity that might have been shown on the field and break bread together... and by bread I actually mean pizza.” Several older players also mentioned that socials allowed them to make lasting friendships with players on other teams. In general, socials seem to be an occurrence that promotes sportsmanship and goodwill between opposing teams, and are a vital part of why rugby is felt to be a “camaraderie sport”.

### Sense of Community

Every single player interviewed felt that there was a strong sense of community on the AU women’s rugby team. This feeling came not only from the trust established from playing together, but from the network of friendships and support the women felt they received from the team outside of rugby-related activities. 80% of the team members interviewed have roommates who they met through the rugby team as either current or former players. Most of the players stated that their closest friends and “main hangouts”

were from AUWRFC, and several interviewees had even been involved in romantic relationships with teammates.

Almost all reported that they see someone from the rugby team on a daily basis, even when there are no official rugby events that day. Even in their other extra-curricular activities, players mentioned a heavy presence from the rugby team; several team members are a part of AU's Women's Initiative and Alpha Phi Omega community service fraternity, and several players performed in AU's production of the Vagina Monologues this past year. Frequently, teammates reported getting meals, going out on the weekends, doing homework in the library, or simply meeting up on campus. One player stated of her teammates,

[laughing] Well I feel like, when we're on campus, if there is a group of three of us, more will come... If there's two, no, but if you run into that third person, more people will come and all of a sudden there are eight of you.

Players report a sense that they "got each other's backs", both on the field and off. They gave examples of driving other players to the emergency room when necessary, or once when younger players called an older player for a ride from a fraternity house party they didn't feel safe at.

While the majority of respondents' answers showed the team's sense of community in a positive light, it seemed that many of their main criticisms was that there was occasionally *too much* togetherness. When asked about their least favorite part of being on the team, about half of the subjects stated the large time commitment required both for the athletics and the social side of the sport. A player on the team for four seasons stated, "Because we see each other a lot, and because we're very involved in people's lives, sometimes it feels like we don't get a break. Sometimes it feels like rugby is taking over my life." Another player reported that it was sometimes hard to "draw the line" as to what was rugby-related and was what not. Many other respondents added that sometimes too much



involvement created negative “team feelings”. Interestingly, most of the players who said this specifically distinguished between team “politics” and team “drama” – politics implying contention over the administrative functioning of the team, and drama being interpersonal disagreements or personality clashes.

Several other players disliked the fact that the time commitment kept them from pursuing other activities in addition to rugby, that their playing caused arguments with their parents, or that playing was physically so taxing on their bodies. When asked, many of the players interviewed stated that these factors had driven them to consider quitting the team at some point in their athletic career. Notably, only one person cited a rugby-related injury as the reason for possibly leaving the team, even though 50% of respondents reported being injured and unable to play at some point in their career. Some injuries were very serious, such as a torn ligament, a broken bone, a collapsed lung, and several concussions, yet this seemed to have very little to no impact on their choice to continue playing rugby.

Ultimately, the players who had considered quitting stayed on the team because of their love of the sport and because of the friendships they had formed on the team and wanted to maintain. This seems to fit in with one player’s description that the sense of the community on the team “has its ups and downs”. Overall, however, players overwhelmingly agree that the sense of community on the team is what ties them to it.

### Self-Perception

Another universal feeling among players interviewed was the positive effects rugby had on their perceptions of themselves. Being one of the more open-ended questions on the interview guide, there was a wide variety in responses to how specifically it impacted their

perception of themselves. Several players stated that rugby was a positive way to manage their stress and aggression, one player even stating that rugby was “cathartic”. Physically, many players mentioned how rugby has made them feel fitter, tougher, and stronger. Especially among the smaller players interviewed, rugby has given them more confidence in their own abilities – one player stated that playing “makes you appreciate what your body can do”, and another said it helped her see “just how athletic I could be”. Several players who hadn’t played sports before joining rugby now considered themselves “athletes”, and many players who had played sports previously considered themselves “more of an athlete” since switching to rugby.

Many interviewees’ perceptions of the physical benefits of playing seemed to not be limited to just the game; one player reported that playing made her feel more confident and comfortable socially, especially when meeting new people. One player said that playing rugby had “backed up [her] claims of being a badass”, and another stated that rugby showed her that “you can break norms, and it’s okay.” A few players took this question as an opportunity to explain how rugby helped them in exploring or coming to terms with their sexuality with the support of an accepting environment. Several players who had served on the Executive Board also mentioned that rugby helped them see themselves as more of a leader. Especially among older players, their perceptions of themselves changed when they realized what they had to offer to the team.

Overall, the social aspect of AUWRFC appears to be a vital element in retaining players year after year, as it facilitates the intense friendships and sense of community that brings members together. With these collective findings in mind, the next section will examine the results through a sociological lens.

# Analysis

## Rugby as a Social Identity

One player addressed this issue directly, and stated that joining AUWRFC gave her the sense of “being a rugger”. According to Tajfel’s theory, being in a group is based on and individual finding “value and emotional significance attached to that group” (Tajfel 1978:63). Based on the findings, players find value in the challenge of rugby’s physicality, and emotional significance in the relationships and supportive community they form with their teammates. Tajfel also points out, an individual will not remain a member of a group if they do not perceive themselves as benefitting from being a part of the group. As the results collectively show, there is a plethora of benefits players gain from playing rugby, including staying in shape, increased confidence about their bodies and themselves as a whole, lasting friendships, and a supportive, accepting environment.

Following concepts of social identity theory, members of AUWRFC create an “us/them” dynamic of in-groups and out-groups. Notably, this occurs on multiple levels. First is that of separating rugby from other sports in claiming it is more challenging and more physically and mentally demanding than other athletic competitions. Players place a positive valuation on their sport, perceiving it to make them tougher and more “badass” than the out-group of non-rugby-players. This is even seen in the terminology of the sport: a “rugger” is any person, male or female, who plays rugby. This sets rugby players apart from the general population and thus provides some measure of identity in a larger social context.

This idea is also supported by several of the players’ comments about an international rugby community. One player said that rugby “creates a wider-spread culture... like, if you’re out at a bar and you meet someone and they say, oh I play rugby...

you have this mutual, shared thing.” Another player said that part of what helps bring all rugby players in America together is the fact that it is still an obscure, little-known sport, which makes their membership in the in-group of ruggers that much more exclusive.

The second level that this social group differentiation occurs on is that of AUWRFC versus other rugby teams. While many respondents mentioned the things that they have in common with other teams, such as struggling with funds and resources, they differentiated AUWRFC from other teams socially. Several players stated that their team has “got each other’s backs” more than other teams, who they have seen bicker and fight on the pitch during games. Based on their interactions with other teams at socials and tournaments, several players said they believe that on the whole AU’s team is more socially outgoing, accepting, and inclusive of everyone than other teams are. One respondent specifically said that AUWRFC was more “gay-friendly” than other teams she had interacted with. Several players mentioned that they believed their team got along better both on and off of the field than other teams. These statements support the idea that AUWRFC players not only differentiate themselves from the general population because of their sport, but also differentiate themselves as a unique group within the rugby community.

However, an interesting point discovered in the interviews was that despite this differentiation, the rugby team stands apart from some other AU club sports in that membership seems more inclusive of any outsiders who express interest in playing. While some of the other club sports teams hold try-outs at the beginning of the semester, the rugby team will accept and “nurture” anyone who wants to play, according to a senior on the team. Similarly, another player emphasized that every body type, and thus anyone interested, could be suited for rugby, as there is such a variety of positions on the field at the same time.

### Primary Groups

Immediately fitting in with Cooley's concept of primary groups, all of the subjects used "we" in describing AUWRFC at least once over the course of their interview. By identifying themselves in conjunction with the rest of the team, even though the team was not present, respondents reinforced the sense of "we-ness" players feel towards their teammates. This phrasing was especially prevalent when players were discussing the leadership of the Executive Board, or relating to the many team traditions, which all members participate in. In addition, the team fits all of Cooley's five criteria for primary groups. Players have frequent face-to-face interaction that occurs both at rugby-centered events and outside of official team functions. Having been a team at the university since 1996, the team enjoys relative permanence in that graduating or injured players are continually replaced to keep the team going. Relative to American University's student body of nearly 7,000 undergraduates, the rugby team of roughly 30 players every semester is a small number of people forming a group. Lastly, the relative intimacy of players on the team is high in that most players report having close friends on the team.

Players also reinforced the idea of a primary group in the wording of their answers: one member stated that the team was "like a family" to her. Another player, a freshman, stated that the rugby team helped her adjust to college life and independence, suggesting that in the absence of the family as a primary group, the rugby team can serve as a primary group that facilitates socialization.

Just as Cooley states that primary groups give rise to social ideals, respondent's emphasis on the team as a friendly, open, accepting, and supportive space reinforces the idea of the team

as a primary group. One player stated that the team was “where you just be yourself,” and are included as whatever you want to be. Just as families can foster certain values in their children, AUWRFC as a group has established the “social ideals” of inclusiveness and support; members are expected to socialize to these set values.

## Conclusion

Throughout the course of this study, two core questions were answered: why women play rugby, and what aspects of team culture encourage players to continue their involvement with the team over many seasons. Rugby as a sport is appealing to new players for its physicality and challenge, but what truly draws players into AUWRFC is the sense of camaraderie and community on the team – a wide network of relationships that are reinforced by the student-led structure of the team, the process of learning a new sport together, and the many elaborate and sometimes silly system of team traditions.

The findings of this research appear to be consistent with the themes presented in similar studies; however, as a student research project time and available resources limited this study. This study only focuses on one sample of a college-level rugby team, and one that the researcher had been personally involved with for several years before conducting this study. While attempts were made to control for researcher bias and emotional involvement, the fact that the interviewer was also an active member of the group being studied should be taken into consideration.

Because the interviews were semi-structured, though, the interviews could easily be replicated using the same interview guide. A researcher who is not directly involved with the team being studied may better limit the amount of bias in the study, as well as have a better understanding of how to relate rugby-specific terms and concepts to a broader audience. Because the scope of this study was so limited, further research could be in-depth interviews with members of various teams from different regions across the United States. Similarly, research could be conducted on a women's club team to compare any possible differences in team culture from a university-level team.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Rugby Terminology

**Backs:** generally, the faster players; once a ball is retrieved from a ruck, the backs run down the field while passing the ball; includes the scrumhalf, the flyhalf, centers, wings, and the fullback

**Forwards:** generally, the larger stronger players; the forwards take the ball into contact, form rucks and mauls, and are responsible for forming scrums and line-outs; includes the hooker, props, locks, flankers, and eightman

**Knock-on:** when the ball is passed or fumbled forward; a scrum is then awarded to the opposite team

**Line-out:** when a team carries the ball out of bounds, the opposing team throws the ball in; both teams have two “lifters” pick up a “jumper”, who contests for the ball mid-air

**Match:** a rugby game

**Maul:** when a player is held up by the opposing team but not brought to the ground, a maul is formed; players from both teams try to drive the ball down the pitch

**Pitch:** the game field

**Returner:** on AUWRFC, any player who has played for more than one season

**Rookie:** a brand-new player who is in their first season with AUWRFC

**Rugger:** an American term referring to any rugby player, regardless of gender or skill level

**Ruck:** when a player is tackled and brought to the ground, a ruck is formed; players from both teams try to drive each other away from the ball to gain possession for their own team

**Scrum:** when a penalty occurs, a scrum may be called; both teams’ forwards bind together and compete for possession of the ball

**Tackle:** when a defensive player brings the player carrying the ball to the ground

**Try:** when a player places the ball on the ground in the opposing team’s try-zone, worth five points; followed by a conversion kick worth a possible two extra points

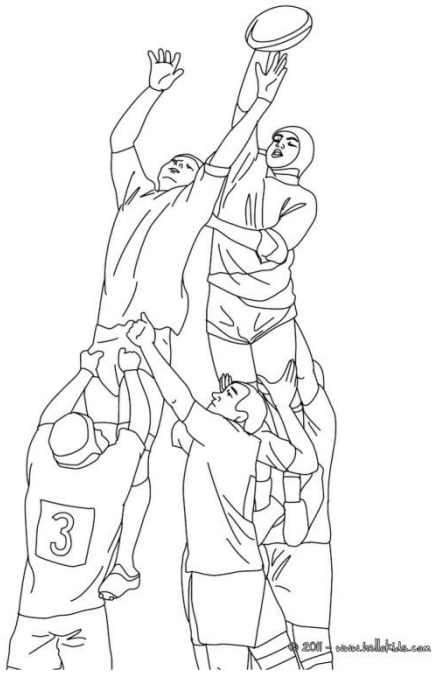


SCRUM:



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## Appendix 2: Human Subjects Certification



## **Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form**

You are being asked to participate in a research study of the culture surrounding women's rugby. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a current member of the American University Women's Rugby Football Club (AUWRFC). Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the interview.

**What is being studied:** The purpose of this study is to learn why women play rugby, and what aspects of rugby culture affect team participation with AUWRFC.

**What is being asked of you:** If you agree to participate in this study, I will interview you about your background with the AU women's rugby team, how you view the team and the sport as a whole, and how you view yourself since joining the team. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete, and with your permission I would like to record our interview.

**Confidentiality:** All of your interview answers will be kept completely confidential and private. Your name will not be used to identify you in this capstone project. The researcher is the only person who will have access to any notes, recordings, or transcriptions from your interview.

**Participation is voluntary:** Taking part in this interview is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. If you decide to take part in the interview, you may withdraw at any time.

**If you have questions:** Please ask any questions you may have about the study now. If you have any questions later, you may contact Erika Baumann at eb4210a@american.edu or (908)-358-5852. If you have any questions regarding your right as a research subject, you may contact Dr. Andrea Brenner at brenner@american.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the information above and have received answers to my questions. I consent to take part in this study.

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_

Name (printed):\_\_\_\_\_

In addition to consenting to participate in this study, I consent to have my interview recorded.

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_

Name (printed):\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher (printed):\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4: Interview Guide

Hello! Thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my research with AUWRFC. The following interview questions will cover a variety of topics, such as your introduction to the AU rugby team, your thoughts concerning the team and the overall sport, your perceptions of how others see rugby, and your perceptions of yourself. The interview will take approximately one hour, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. To begin, I will ask a few questions to determine the demographic makeup of those being interviewed.

### Demographics:

- 1) Name
- 2) Year
- 3) Age
- 4) Race
- 5) Seasons Played
- 6) What other organizations on campus are you a part of?  
(can include on-campus jobs or internships for credit)

I am now going to ask questions relating to your introduction to the sport and the team. There will also be questions asking how you think others perceive rugby.

### Introduction to Rugby:

- 7) How did you hear about rugby at AU?
- 8) What year were you when you joined?
- 9) What originally made you want to join the team?
- 10) What made you want to stay on the team after first joining?

- 11) Were your parents supportive of your decision to play rugby?
- 12) Were your friends supportive of your decision to play rugby?
- 13) How do people react when they hear that you play rugby?

In this next section, I will ask both broad questions relating to how you feel about the sport and the AU team, as well as questions relating specifically to your own involvement with the team and your teammates.

### Rugby Culture

- 14) What is your favorite part of being a part of the team, or of rugby as a whole?
- 15) What is your least favorite part about being a part of the team, or of rugby as a whole?
- 16) Did you ever consider quitting?

If so, why?

If so, what made you ultimately decide to stay on the team?

- 17) Have you ever been injured playing rugby?

If so, did this change your relationship with the team?

- 18) Have you ever held a leadership position on the team?

If so, please briefly explain your duties and how you felt serving in this position.

- 19) Does the team have any traditions?

If so, what affect do these activities have on the team?

- 20) How often do you spend time with other team members outside of official rugby functions?

- 21) Do you feel that there is a sense of community on the team?

If so, how does that manifest itself?

22) How do you think AU's team compares with other teams, both at the college level and beyond?

This section contains questions that involve your perceptions of yourself, and what factors may have influenced those perceptions.

### Self-Perception

23) Has playing on the team affected how you see yourself?

If so, how?

If so, do you see these changes as positive or negative?

24) Did you consider yourself an athlete before coming to college?

25) Do you currently consider yourself an athlete?

Lastly, I would like to offer you the opportunity to ask me any questions you may have about the research, or to make any final statements concerning rugby or AUWRFC.

### Conclusion

24) Is there anything you need me to clarify?

25) Is there anything you would like to add that I did not ask about?

Thank you again for being a part of this research!

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