United Glasgow Football Club
A pilot study in sport's facilitation of integration

Olivia Booth, Salvator Cusimano, Evan Elise Easton-Calabria and Elisabeth Kühn
evan.eastoncalabria@gmail.com

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List of abbreviations

UGFC   United Glasgow Football Club

1   Introduction

Around the world, sport has increasingly been touted as a vehicle for social change by organisations, academics and athletes alike. Sport programmes are said to promote conflict resolution, physical and mental health, and acceptance of diversity (BBC 2011; Watson Institute 2011; Comic Relief 2013). Sport has also been applied to facilitate the integration of migrant groups into host societies (Refugee Council of Australia 2010). The German government, for example, cited its 'Integration through Sport' programme as having introduced 38,000 newcomers to sports, with plans for programme expansion underway (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2011). Contrary to the assumptions of many practitioners, however, research also suggests that sport can serve as a medium for inter-ethnic segregation and conflict (Krouwel *et al.* 2006).

Responding to these various applications of sport, this study asks whether sport can facilitate the integration of refugees and asylum seekers, and seeks to identify the mechanisms through which this may occur. This study examines United Glasgow Football Club (UGFC), a team that competes in an anti-racist football league in Glasgow, Scotland, and is comprised of a mixture of Scottish nationals, refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants. The project was initially targeted at young men in the asylum system, but is now open to all. Drawing upon Putnam's social capital framework, we found that UGFC served as a platform for players to build social bridges and bonds, and its diversity contributed to a feeling of belonging that many team members did not find elsewhere in Glasgow.

Context

Since 1999, Glasgow has been the only city in Scotland to host asylum seekers as part of the UK government's dispersal policy (Scottish Refugee Council 2013). Whilst the Scottish government does not control immigration policy, many of the policy areas that have been linked to integration – such as health, housing and education – are devolved matters. The Scottish National Party government has taken a very different approach to multiculturalism and integration in public discourse than the current Conservative-Liberal and previous Labour administrations in Westminster.

Football itself has a distinct history in Glasgow, with the 'Old Firm' rivalry between Celtic and Ranger football clubs reflecting deeper social-economic and sectarian divisions in Glaswegian society (The Guardian 2011). As one participant suggested, 'You can't grow up in Scotland and not be aware of that. You can't follow football in Scotland without being asked, "Who's your team, Rangers or Celtic?"'[1]

Football's salience within Glaswegian culture and society, as well as its often negative instrumentalisation, makes it relevant to the study of the role of sport in facilitating integration. It also means that our findings are situated within a particular context. We do not, therefore, aim to draw generalisable conclusions from this case study. Instead, we envision this as a pilot study and intend to create more dialogue about possible methods and outcomes of using sport to facilitate the integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

[1] Interview with Participant 4, 8 January 2013. For a full list of interviews, see Appendix 1.

We begin our paper with an in-depth explanation of our theoretical framework. We follow with an outline and discussion of our study's methodology and limitations. The final section presents our findings, analysis and how these findings relate to the integration 'model' discussed above. We conclude with possible policy implications of our research and suggestions for how this study could be expanded upon in larger research projects.

2   Theory

Our fundamental research aim is to shed light on the connection between sports and integration: Can sport foster integration, and, if so, how is this accomplished? To do so, we conducted preliminary research on sport and integration, and its theories. We then synthesised these theories and findings to create the integration model that informs our study of if, when and how sport can positively contribute to the chosen aspects of integration.

We focused on Ager and Strang's integration framework (2008; 2010) and Putnam's theory of social capital (2000) to examine links between integration and social connections. Ager and Strang's framework, drawing upon definitions provided by Mulvey (2010) and the UK Home Office (2005), defines integration as:

> *the process that takes place when refugees are empowered to achieve their full potential as members of British society, to contribute to the community, and to become fully able to exercise the rights and responsibilities that they share with other residents.* (UK Home Office 2005: 5)

This is an ideal situation that should be the result of a successful integration process. Apart from integration being defined as this *result*, we conceive of integration as a *process.* In order to achieve this inclusion (not assimilation) into a society, we consider integration to be a two-way process that requires active involvement from both refugees and asylum seekers, as well as members of the host community (Lomba 2010; Mulvey 2010). Ager and Strang posit that while immigration status questions are considered important by asylum seekers and refugees, having the skills, knowledge and feeling of belonging that are necessary for the *process* of integration is even more important (Ager and Strang 2008; Ager and Strang 2010).

One of the four broad domains[2] that Ager and Strang identify as crucial for integration, and which also corresponds to our definition, is 'processes of social connection within and between groups' (Ager and Strang 2008: 185; see also Putnam 2002: 5). These social connections can be seen as building individual social capital. Putnam's theory of social capital[3] differentiates between inward social capital and outward social capital, with the latter divided into social links, social bridges and social bonds. Inward social capital is defined as the individual emotional resources and the ability for capacity building in a particular social surrounding (Putnam 2002: 9). It is the confidence of an individual to be able to 'play within the system' of expectations and rules in a particular surrounding (Atfield, Brahmbhatt and

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[2] The remaining three broad domains are the 'foundation' (rights and citizenship), 'facilitators' (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability), and 'markers and means' (employment, housing, education and health). See Ager and Strang (2008: 170).

[3] Putnam himself quotes a definition by Woolcock and Narayan (2000) as providing a useful definition: 'The basic idea of social capital is that a person's family, friends and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called upon on in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and leveraged for material gain.'

O'Toole 2007; Losi and Strang 2008; Spicer 2008; Calhoun, LiPuma and Postone 1993). Social links refer to the ease of connections between an individual and structures of the state; the classic example is contact with bureaucratic processes (Ager and Strang 2010: 596; Putnam 2000). Social bridges refer to contact between individuals and members of the surrounding society (Putnam 2002: 10). Importantly, social bridges do not demand a high level of friendship and regular interaction. Trust, defined as the abstract knowledge to be able to rely on one another, is sufficient (Ager and Strang 2010: 599; Putnam 1993: 167). This focus on trust also emphasises the approach to integration as a two-way process, as reciprocity is crucial for trust. Finally, social bonds are the connections between members of the same ethnic and/or social group, such as between non-nationals or between those of the same country of origin (Putnam 2002: 9f.; Ager and Strang 2010).

Sport

The third theoretical aspect of our study is *if* and *how* sport contributes to the building of social capital as defined above. Reporting on the merits of sport programmes for refugees, the Refugee Council of Australia (2010) cited numerous benefits, including a sense of purpose and direction, improved English, psychological healing, physical fitness and exposure to Australian sporting culture. The implicit assumption in such research is that these positive benefits – which resemble inward social capital – will translate into a deeper sense of belonging for the refugee. By contrast, Krouwel and colleagues (2006) found that the conflict, aggression and violence that can emerge over the course of competitive sport activities may spill over into everyday life (Krouwel *et al.* 2006: 175). Bradbury (2011), meanwhile, found that minority-based football clubs often emerged as a response to prevalent discrimination, and may serve as a means for the assertion and reinforcement of particular identities. While positive assessments of sport's potential contribution to integration recognise the existence of racism in sport, racism is presented as a barrier to access that must be overcome, rather than a negative outcome that may be part and parcel of the sporting experience (Refugee Council of Australia 2010; Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues 2007). Thus, sport may have a detrimental impact upon social bridging if sport clubs serve as a base for stronger ethnic identification against perceived threats from society and if conflicts off the pitch – such as those driven by differences in ethnicity or in socio-economic status – are replicated during games.

If these divisive experiences common in sport can be avoided, then sport may contribute to the building of inward social capital and all categories of outward social capital. Sport can build communication and social skills (leading to inward social capital, social bridges and social links) as well as facilitate participation in an arguably central aspect of a host community's culture (again, enabling both social bridges and social links). Finally, these social capital-building processes may be more likely to occur in sport environments that can avoid ethnic conflict and division.

3   Methodology

Data collection took place in Glasgow over the course of five days in January 2013. We conducted sixteen semi-structured interviews and carried out participant observation at a team training session and during an evening social with the participants. Participants were informed of the research project's subject, purpose and methods and orally consented to their involvement. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, with the exception of one, in which the participant preferred the interviewer to take written notes. The recordings have

remained confidential, and participants' anonymity has been maintained in all published and presented materials.

Our sample comprised of fourteen players, the coach and the team manager. The participants were all male, between the ages of 18 and approximately 30, and represented a range of national origins. Seven participants were born in the UK, one was from mainland Europe and eight were originally from African countries, having arrived in Scotland to seek asylum, study or work. In this study we sometimes speak of 'Africans,' as this was the term these participants most frequently used to speak of themselves and each other, despite the range of African nationalities they represented. Although we did not specifically discuss the topic of asylum during interviews, we became aware that participants had a variety of immigration statuses.

Access

The team's manager, with whom one of the researchers was already acquainted, facilitated our contact with the team members. He arranged some of the interviews prior to our arrival in Glasgow, and we scheduled several additional interviews with team members who showed interest in the research project. In regard to participant observation, one researcher participated as a player in the team training session, while the other researchers observed from the sidelines. The main social participant observation took place at a pub outing on our final night in Glasgow. We did not provide compensation to the participants for their involvement in the study. However, access was negotiated with the understanding that we would produce materials for the team's outreach and fundraising activities.

Selection of methods

We elected to conduct semi-structured interviews as our primary means of data collection, due to the well-documented benefits of this method's flexibility and adaptability to participants' subjectivity and the natural course of an interview (Smith and Osborn 2008: 58-59). Semi-structured interviews also allowed us to make sense of various levels of meaning (King 2004: 20-21) and to '[acknowledge] that not every word has the same meaning to every respondent' (Barriball and While 1994: 330). This was important in our research, as we dealt fundamentally with concepts – such as integration, belonging and trust – which are potentially imbued with multiple levels of meaning and definitions that varied greatly from participant to participant. Modifying our interview questions in response to this subjectivity provided rich insights. This method also enabled us to adapt our interview schedule to account for participants' 'varied professional, educational and personal histories,' which would have rendered some questions in a standardised schedule irrelevant (Barriball and While 1994: 330). Moreover, despite having consulted the team's manager in the process of devising our interview schedule, we recognised that our participants' experience of integration in Glasgow and designing sport programmes meant that they would be able to offer additional, unforeseen insights. Semi-structured interviews permitted us to explore such issues as they arose (Smith and Osborn 2008: 59). In addition, we selected participant observation as a supplement to the semi-structured interviews because it provided insight into the everyday lives of participants, outside of the artificial interview setting (Jorgensen 1989: 15).

Bias and subjectivity

Face-to-face interviews are a research method particularly prone to bias, as respondents may modify responses depending on their expectations of what the interviewer wants to hear (McBurney and White 2010: 252). Equally, the interviewer may send signals or cues that shape the responses elicited (King 2004: 13). Thus, we were aware of several factors that may that have influenced our interactions with participants and the information they shared.

Negotiating access to the participants required us to demonstrate our interest in the team's success as an anti-racism initiative and agree to the use of our final report for further team outreach and fundraising activities. Participants were aware of these terms, and some said they hoped they had answered our questions 'correctly'. A few endorsed the team explicitly during interviews.

Before commencing research, we had anticipated the possibility that participants might present the team in a favourable light by emphasising its positive qualities and avoiding discussion of any possible negative or neutral aspects. In order to obtain a clearer picture of the team's contribution to integration, we structured the interviews around factual questions about members' experiences on the team, rather than simply asking them to reflect on the team's value as a mechanism for integration. We also conducted participant observation as a means of confirming the participants' portrayals of the team presented in the interviews.

In addition, we are aware that gender and class may have influenced our interactions with the participants, both from our point of view and the perspective of the participants. During our participant observation, when the three female researchers watched from the sidelines and the male researcher joined the all-male team for training, we became keenly aware of the gendered space of the football team. One female researcher identified the need for a certain level of emotional distance to maintain professionalism, while another believed that a participant assumed that she was uninterested in football. In addition to the gendered aspects of our interactions, our perceived social status may have shaped our relationship with participants. Our identity as researchers from Oxford, the academic language we sometimes used and the manner in which we dressed may have led participants to make assumptions about our social class and, correspondingly, the type of information we were interested in, or our reactions to the content and manner of their speech.

Limitations

Given the nature of this study, its findings are not generalisable; our study has been conceived as a case study of one team. Although we asked participants to reflect on the broader social impact of football in general, the subjective opinions of this limited number of participants are not sufficient to substantiate claims about the impact that playing football might have elsewhere for a different group of players. Indeed, although our interviews and observations provide insight into the ways in which playing on a football team *could* facilitate integration, the particular social context in which UGFC exists is inseparable from our findings. A further limit on generalisability arises from an inherent feature of semi-structured interviews: they do not easily allow for objective, systematic analysis, since 'any differences in the answers are due to differences among the respondents rather than in the questions asked' (Barriball and While 1994: 330).

Our study was also limited by the brevity of our time in Glasgow and the restricted availability of our participants, meaning that we had little time to become acquainted with them or appreciate the social context in which our research was occurring. Furthermore, our lack of familiarity with team members meant that gaining their confidence began only with the interview. With more time in Glasgow, we may have been better able to adjust our interview schedule and engage more comfortably with participants. Limited time also prevented us from benefitting from a wider range of research methods. We recognise that given the nature of our project, which studies *social interactions*, the interview method is inherently limited. With more time, in-depth participant observation may have provided more than mere impressions, for inserting oneself fully into the participants' natural environment often requires significant

time investment (Spradley 1980). Focus groups might also have offered further insight into team dynamics, while additionally providing answers to specific questions.

Finally, due to ethical concerns, we refrained from requesting any information about participants' immigration status and their experiences prior to arriving in Glasgow. Although some disclosed this information, we are unable to fully consider how experiences in a refugee or asylum seeker's country of origin, for example, affect their experience of football as a mechanism of integration.

4 Findings

In the context of this case study, sport does appear to facilitate integration. In terms of social capital, we observed evidence of inward social capital, and of social bonds, bridges and links. Concerns raised in the sport literature regarding conflict replication or ethnic affiliation did not appear relevant. Our findings also suggest a particular conception of integration, where the team provides an international social space in which participants feel 'at home' due to its diversity. This space allows participants to step outside identities based on nationality and immigration status and interact equally as footballers. This may transcend existing conceptions of integration, which mainly conceptualise a process by which immigrants learn to 'fit' into a host society. Our findings suggest a process that transforms both the 'host' and the 'newcomer,' indeed envisioning integration as a 'two-way street.'

Overall, participants were positive about their experience on the team and expressed a high level of commitment to the team itself, as well as particular enthusiasm for the 'message' of the project. Reasons for joining the team varied, but the majority of participants joined to play football, rather than participate in an anti-racist project. This was, however, the reason for some participants' selection of UGFC in particular. Many were attracted to the team due to previous contact with the manager, its well-organised nature and the players' skill level. Meanwhile, many of the African team members reported wanting to spend time with other Africans as a motivation for joining.

Inward social capital
Inward social capital was expressed by non-Scottish team members, who felt that playing football helped them to learn English and provided them with an important source of physical fitness.[4] Others felt that playing football had helped them learn about Scottish culture, both by allowing them to participate in 'the past-time of this country'[5] and by exposing them to Scottish vernacular.[6] Some participants also reported benefits for their mental health. As one participant said, 'When I'm playing football, I don't think of anything else. I don't think of my problems, problems back home…probably [if I didn't play football] I would be kind of depressed, because I would be thinking a lot.'[7] These examples confirm many of the benefits of sport cited in the literature and demonstrate that playing football can contribute to building inward social capital.

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[4] Interview with Participant 10, 11 January 2013.
[5] Interview with Participant 15, 12 January 2013.
[6] Interview with Participant 16, 12 January 2013.
[7] Interview with Participant 9, 10 January 2013.

Social bonds

Evidence of social bonds was found through friendships formed through the team, and through teammates going to nightclubs,[8] to the gym[9] and, on at least one occasion, a Celtic match together.[10] However, the majority of participants did not regard teammates as close friends, and their main social circles were outside the team. Participants who already had social networks often did not have the time to build strong bonds with other players:

> *I'm in a position in which I've got a hell of a circle to choose from, it's hard enough to fit all of my mates in without joining a team, you know. But for someone coming into Glasgow, it's absolutely vital you know? You come in, you meet people from this country, your country, neighbouring countries, you form a bond with them, brilliant.*[11]

Both at the training session we observed and during a night out with the team at a local pub, the players joked and chatted – although, in these social situations, Scottish participants tended to socialise with other Scots and African participants with other Africans. Combined with the desire to spend time with 'other Africans,' this tendency should be seen less as 'segregation' and more as evidence of social bonding for newcomers lacking social networks in Scotland.

Social bridges

Participants appeared friendly and relaxed around each other and the majority of players stated that they trust their teammates. Definitions for this trust ranged from being able to ask teammates for help[12] to feeling comfortable giving them keys to their flat.[13] Moreover, some participants stated that this trust had grown over the course of playing together.[14] However, the majority of non-Scottish participants did not talk with teammates about personal problems related to their recent arrival in the UK, and many stated that if they had such a problem they would approach the manager for help. Scottish players in particular spoke of knowing little about the backgrounds of their non-Scottish teammates. However, as noted above, social bridging does not require close friendship or regular interactions; evidence of trust on the team indicates social bridging among participants.

Social links

There were isolated instances of social links formed through being a member of the team, such as help with job applications and dealing with the Home Office. However, the majority of participants had not asked teammates for any kind of help. Many participants stated, however, that if they had a problem they would approach the manager. Although participants did not seem to view the team as their primary source of bureaucratic assistance, there were instances where they took advantage of their teammates' knowledge. Perhaps more importantly, participants also found new opportunities through the team, such as undertaking accredited coaching training. This allowed them to gain skills, experience and accreditation to further their personal and career goals. Meanwhile, some participants had partaken more actively in anti-racism activities since joining the team, such as participating in an annual anti-racist march as representatives of UGFC.

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[8] Interview with Participant 11, 11 January 2013.

[9] Interview with Participant 16.

[10] Interview with Participant 6, 9 January 2013.

[11] Interview with Participant 7, 9 January 2013.

[12] Interview with Participant 16.

[13] Interview with Participant 14, 12 January 2013.

[14] Interview with Participant 16.

Perceptions of football

All participants cited football as a positive part of their life. Most participants felt that football was inherently unifying, referring to the 'universality' of the sport and its popularity in Scotland. Although we did not find a consistent association between football and violence, some participants suggested that football could amplify – or fail to diminish – existing or underlying rivalries: 'I suppose it can unify…[or] it can be divisive…there's clubs that hate each other…I think they use [football] as an excuse.'[15]

All of our participants were aware of sectarianism in Glasgow and the Celtic-Rangers rivalry. Some participants identified themselves as Celtic supporters and were involved in supporters groups, but distanced themselves from both sectarianism and violence associated with football. Many participants also mentioned incidents of racism in professional football, and some suggested that anti-racist initiatives in grassroots football could contribute to countering these problems. According to one participant: 'It's difficult for foreigners to be integrated in a first division team if you're not Scottish…so this anti-racism league, when they make everybody play against each other – because there are Scottish teams too – they were learning the message of anti-racism in football.'[16]

Participants reported that there were no incidents of conflict among players beyond occasional disagreements, which, in the words of one participant, happen 'just like on any other football team.'[17] The reproduction of conflict, which has been cited as impeding integration, was thus not present in our findings. However, almost all participants mentioned one incident in which a player from an opposing club directed a racial epithet at a UGFC player: '[A player] was called a monkey by one of [another team's] players…And yeah, it was terrible…but it was a fucking motivational tool…That is our Old Firm…The training that week [the next time they were due to play the team] everyone was there.'[18] Thus, the overall effect of this conflict seems to have been bonding, with the incident actually eliciting and reinforcing some participants' commitment to the anti-racist message of the project.

International social space

The team's diversity is one factor that allows it to contribute to integration. As discussed above, this diversity was a factor that attracted many African participants who keenly felt their minority status. One participant discussed his initial experiences playing amateur football in Scotland: '[It was my] first time in an environment where there are no black people and no other foreigners, so straight away, I kind of felt out of place.'[19] By contrast, he explained, 'meeting fellow Africans' when he plays with UGFC makes him feel more relaxed and less of an outsider.[20]

Football itself played an important role in creating this atmosphere. Participants repeatedly emphasised football's universal, cross-cultural appeal[21] and explained that the form of communication present in football allowed the transcendence of language barriers often present elsewhere in society: 'That's the beauty of football: it's quite common so everyone

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[15] Interview with Participant 15.

[16] Interview with Participant 11.

[17] Interview with Participant 10.

[18] Interview with Participant 4.

[19] Interview with Participant 9.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Interview with Participant 4.

knows how to play it. Everyone gets it; you don't have to worry about communicating, about language barriers.'[22]

Scottish players also had a chance to build relationships with people from different backgrounds, suggesting that the team's diversity facilitates integration from the perspective of its Scottish members as well. In the words of one participant: 'It gets you that platform where you can actually have a conversation [with someone from another background] and not just a fleeting, passing "one-off."'[23] The fact that ethnic conflict reproduction, which the literature identifies as potentially impeding integration, was absent, further reinforces this possibility.

Overall, although most informants stated that football was unifying and positive for integration, the fact that some mentioned its potential divisiveness and the Celtic-Rangers rivalry in Glasgow suggests that some participants were aware of sport's potential pitfalls, yet felt that UGFC was effective in avoiding such conflicts. The general awareness of the possible use of football for promoting violence and sectarianism in Glasgow in particular, stands in contrast to the majority of participants' personal experiences, especially with their current team. This can perhaps, in part, be attributed to the team's clear message and mission. Many players also spoke of their manager's dedication, enthusiasm and belief in the project's cause, suggesting a further recognition of the need for leadership, structure and a clear team ethos to enable such a unifying social space in football.

Discussions of the team's national 'mixture' and the modes of communication present, suggest the creation of an international social space that is not present elsewhere in Glasgow. Having such a space seems to contribute to a feeling of 'home' for some of the non-Scottish players, which suggests the positive role involvement in sport plays to their integration in Glasgow. The space observed through this team suggests not merely an 'integration' of foreigners into Scottish society, but a new creation entirely, where the identity as a footballer overrides ethnic, racial and national identities, and allows players on the team to find common ground on the pitch.

5   Conclusions

Many of our findings fit within the model we developed, based on the link between integration and social capital. The team appears to promote both inward social capital, as well as bridging and bonding between participants, whilst concerns raised by Krouwel *et al.* (2006) and others do not appear to be present. However, our findings also go beyond this model. We suggest the team is an international social space, in which participants feel 'at home' because of the diversity of backgrounds. It is also a space in which participants do not need to talk about problems or their nationality, ethnicity or immigration statuses. This allows participants to interact as footballers, regardless of identities off the pitch. These findings suggest that the ways in which integration continues to be conceptualised as a fundamentally assimilationist process by which immigrants learn to 'fit in' in a host society do not capture the transformative effects on both newcomers and hosts. However, further research is necessary to explore these findings in more depth. Further research might also explore how far these findings may be generalisable, for example, if other football teams, different sports or

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[22] Interview with Participant 10.
[23] Interview with Participant 7.

community projects could also offer an environment which both builds social capital and promotes common identities. Of particular interest would be an investigation of whether a team without a specifically anti-racist objective could demonstrate the same value as UGFC.

Our findings suggest that sport may not automatically be positive for integration. The success of sport programmes may require good organisation, committed people and an explicit aim to promote diversity. It may depend further on the local context. In the case of United Glasgow Football Club, however, we have found sport to facilitate integration, both in the conventional use of the term, as well as in less-explored and possibly more transformative ways.

6   Appendix 1

Participant ID	Interview Date	Interview Length	Interviewer
Participant 1	07/01/13	33:31	Researcher 1
Participant 2	07/01/13	41:31*	Researcher 1
Participant 3	07/01/13	01:23:53	Researcher 2
Participant 4	08/01/13	57:32	Researcher 3
Participant 5	08/01/13	31:03*	Researcher 1
Participant 6	09/01/13	50:02	Researcher 2
Participant 7	09/01/13	35:52	Researcher 3
Participant 8	10/01/13	1:15:21	Researcher 4
Participant 9	10/01/13	31:37	Researcher 1
Participant 10	11/01/13	21:06	Researcher 2
Participant 11	11/01/13	20:00	Researcher 3
Participant 12	11/01/13	31:19	Researcher 1
Participant 13	11/01/13	**	Researcher 4
Participant 14	12/01/13	39:40	Researcher 4
Participant 15	12/01/13	31:52	Researcher 1
Participant 16	12/01/13	36:12	Researcher 3

The absence of biographic information is to preserve anonymity of participants on a small team.

* Audio recording corrupted, researcher interview notes used.
** Interview not recorded at request of participant, researcher interview notes used.

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