



University of Brighton

Paired Evaluation

Executive Summary of the Preliminary Report from
the Pilot Evaluation of the Paired App

Jacqui Gabb, Catherine Aicken, Salvatore Di Martino and Tom Witney

15th March 2021

ISBN: 978-1-4730-3227-9

Executive summary

Romantic relationships are extremely important to people's happiness and well-being, yet many people do not seek advice with relationship issues or may do so only once serious problems arise.

Paired is a commercially available relationships app. Launched in October 2020, it currently has over 12,000 daily active users, predominantly in the US and UK.

Public self-management of care (i.e. self-help) is target for technological investment, as digital health and well-being apps gain popularity. There are currently over 318,000 health apps available worldwide, with a further 200+ new health apps coming onto the market each day. Research has shown that mobile health (mHealth, i.e. health and well-being apps) can be effective in supporting behaviour change: helping us to adopt and maintain healthy behaviours. However, many health and well-being apps are not based on reliable research evidence, the only indication of an app's quality deriving from 'user reviews'. Paired is evidence-based. Focusing on the area of romantic relationships, it seeks to support and enhance couple relationships, before the point when professional help may be needed.

Researchers at The Open University (OU) and the University of Brighton evaluated the effectiveness of Paired, using a mixed methods approach.¹ We gathered data from users of Paired, through:

1. A series four brief surveys, implemented via the app's 'quiz' function. These tracked key aspects of Paired users' relationship quality over approximately 3 months (3,717 participants, of which 440 provided complete data suitable for longitudinal analysis; October 2020 to early January 2021);
2. An online survey, implemented outside the app. This collected detailed data, including: demographics, relationship quality, experience of using Paired, and external impacts on relationships in 2020 (745 participants, December 2020);
3. Ongoing qualitative interviews with selected users of the app.

Paired's impact on relationship quality

We created the Quality of Relationship Index (QRI), a rigorously-developed measure of overall relationship quality.² We found that quality of communication – the underpinning dimension of all relationship maintenance behaviour – was most strongly related to overall relationship quality. In particular:

- Relationship quality (QRI) increases by 36% over 3 months' use of Paired.³
- People who use the app on 6 or 7 days per week report the highest relationship quality (QRI): 12% higher than that of people who use it on one day a week or less often.
- The length of time spent on the app per week was not influential, which suggests that it is sustained daily use rather than the quantity of time spent using the app which improves relationship quality.

¹ All percentages in the Executive Summary are rounded to the nearest 1% for ease of reading.

² All analyses using QRI are based on data from the online survey.

³ Based on a comparison of people who had used Paired for different lengths of time.

- Users whose accounts are linked with their partner’s account experience 45% higher relationship quality (QRI) than those who are unlinked. This pairing facilitates in-app interactions⁴, which is central to the app’s design. Using the app together in this way may also indicate both partners’ commitment to improving their relationship.
- Among people who use Paired for more than one week, we estimate that those who have 2 to 3 in-app interactions experience a 19% increase in relationship quality (QRI); whilst those who have 6 or 7 in-app interactions per week experience a 31% increase in QRI.

In developing the QRI, we explored change in different aspects of relationship quality, whilst using Paired:

- **Communication:** Over 3 months’ use of Paired, we saw a steep increase in how openly users communicate with their partner, to a point where 98% agreed or strongly agreed⁵ that they communicate openly with their partner.
- Paired users clearly credited Paired with this improvement: 81% of those who had used the app for at least a month agreed that Paired had helped improve their couple communication, rising to 85% among those who used it on 6 or 7 days in a typical week.
- **Dealing with conflict as a couple:** When they first used Paired, just 16% of users *strongly* agreed that they and their partner were able to discuss and resolve conflict, but this proportion doubled within the first month, and tripled over a 3-month period (to 46%).
- The low initial percentage suggests that conflict is challenging for couples to address. Yet almost half of those who used Paired for more than one month (46%), and half of those who used it on 6 or 7 days in a typical week (50%), credited Paired with helping them to resolve relationship issues.
- **Feeling connected:** 98% of Paired users agreed or strongly agreed that they felt emotionally connected with their partners when they first used the app, leaving little room for improvement. Nevertheless, Paired still appears to benefit couples’ emotional connection: the proportion *strongly* agreeing that they enjoy a positive emotional connection rose from around three-in-five, to almost four-in-five (61% to 78%) over 3 months.
- **Comfort with discussing sex life:** We found an increase over 3 months, from 45% to 55% of users *strongly* agreeing that they were comfortable with discussing their sex life together. The modest increase may reflect the fact that discussing sexual matters is widely acknowledged to be challenging for many couples.

Integration of the findings from our analyses of different data sources, and the ‘dose-response’ effect that we consistently observed, together give us confidence that Paired is responsible for the improvements to relationship quality that its users enjoy.

⁴ In-app interactions are termed ‘conversations’ by Paired.

⁵ 60% *strongly* agreed.

Note: Our evaluation considered Paired’s short-term impact, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic when research participants providing data in December 2020 were facing restrictions, uncertainty, and difficult decisions related to the festive period. Over a longer timeframe, and without these particular challenges, greater improvements in relationship quality may occur.

What makes Paired work?

- Greater duration and frequency of use of the app, having a premium (vs. free) Paired subscription, and being linked with one’s partner via the app (which enables in-app interactions), were all associated with reporting greater benefits from using Paired.⁶
- People who reported experiencing greater benefits from using Paired tended to report higher relationship quality (QRI) – strengthening the evidence that Paired usage results in improvements to relationship quality.
- The above association was weakest among Paired users who reported being ‘very happy’ with their lives, and strongest among those who reported being ‘very unhappy’. The impact of Paired therefore changes depending on the users’ state. Paired may therefore be particularly beneficial to people who are dissatisfied with their life in general, and from that we could assume they are probably dissatisfied with their relationship.

Who uses Paired?

- Paired’s users are diverse in terms of age, sexual orientation, relationship characteristics and parenthood, indicating that the app has broad appeal.
- Users are 29 to 30 years on average, but their ages span the whole (adult) age range. Three-quarters are heterosexual, and one-quarter are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or otherwise diverse in terms of their sexuality and/or gender identity (LGBTQ+ for brevity). One-in-three are married or in a civil partnership.⁷ Whilst around one third are living separately, two-thirds are living together. Paired users’ relationships range from very new to long-term, with substantial proportions of both parents and childfree couples.

⁶ To assess this we used a combined measure, the Benefits of Paired Index, incorporating five possible ways in which Paired may improve relationships: improving communication, providing an effective daily reminder to do something for the relationship, helping to resolve issues within the relationship, helping to identify strengths, and helping to identify problems within the relationship.

⁷ Termed ‘civil union’ in some countries.