Interaction Design for Relationships

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Abstract

The need for treatment has skyrocketed during the epidemic, as well as the demand for relationship therapy. Many couples’ relationships have suffered as a result of quarantine and lockdowns. The goal of this project is to find a way for couples to reconnect with each other. This might be for people waiting in line for treatment together or for couples who believe they can learn more about each other than they do currently. The final concept called LoveTree has suggestions for activities, dates, or topics to talk about. It has been developed by using the five phases of Design Thinking. This paper will go through all five phases in depth, and talks about the design process as well as the applied methods. By which a prototype has been developed in its early stages. Finally, there is a discussion and conclusion of the final result, which goes in depth about how the project contributes to Interaction Design and relationships. Furthermore it takes a look at future steps that could be taken.
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1. Introduction

1.1 General problem

The pandemic was distressing for many people, but especially for those in relationships. Lockdowns forced many people to spend all of their time together. Therapy became increasingly popular, and long queues formed. This was also the case for relationship therapy. In Sweden, there is a ‘care guarantee’ that you will be seen within 90 days. Before covid, roughly 80% of specialist referrals and 75% of operations were completed within this time frame. It is currently at roughly 75% and 55% (Hanning, 2005). This situation sparked the idea for this project. And partly focuses on people waiting in line for relationship therapy.

However, while hiring a coach or psychologist is becoming more common, couples therapy is still considered taboo. Or, more precisely, on having relationship problems rather than on relationship therapy itself. Which is seen as unacceptable in a society where being successful and living the perfect life plays an important role. Those in relationship therapy may be concerned about other people finding out that they are in treatment because it could be assumed that their relationship is in trouble. It is associated with serious relationship problems, sadness and anger (Payne, 2010).

Relationship therapy was not created as a last resource. It is intended to strengthen and restore the couple’s relationship as a whole. However, in many countries, relationship therapy is not covered by insurance (Tseng et al., 2022). As a result, it is common for the individual to pay in full. This is not something that is feasible for everyone. The sessions are frequently paid per hour, and the charges
1.2 Project focus
Although there are various causes of the problem, such as long lines and high costs, the ultimate purpose of this research is not to develop a replacement for relationship therapy. Relationship therapy may still be needed in some cases. The focus is, however, to be appropriate for couples in the queue for relationship therapy or for couples who believe they may benefit from a tool to become closer, and reconnect with each other.

1.3 Motivation
My motivation for this project partly stems from an interest in different types of therapy and what effects they can have on people. In addition, I became interested in the topic of relationships and couples therapy after playing a game called It Takes Two. This game is about the relationship between two parents and during the game they go into therapy. The players must work together to complete the game, while also restoring the bond between the couple. This got me thinking, whether a tool that can be used in reality can also help with strengthening the bond between two people.

1.4 Sub Areas within Interaction Design
A sub-area within Interaction Design that will be explored during this project is Game design. The solution could involve some gamification elements such as a competitive element for couples, playing against, or with each other. Trying to get couples to interact with each other more in a playful way while tackling issues they might have.

Another sub area is tangible interaction, or hybrid games, where a
combination of physical and virtual elements will be used. The exact use of tangible interaction is still very open and needs to be explored through research and concepting.

1.5 Research Question

1.5.1 Primary Question

“How could an interactive support tool, using gamedesign, assist couples who are looking to reconnect with each other in their relationship”

The primary research question investigates the ways of how couples who are in need for couples therapy, or need another way of improving their relationship, can be supported by playing an interactive support tool. Through the research I will take a look at existing interactive solutions, to see what elements are effective and should be combined, and create a new tool that possibly contains the best parts of other existing solutions.

1.5.2 Secondary Questions

In the process I will explore these points of interest:

- What aspects of a relationship do people consider to be good or bad qualifications?
- What existing resources are available in the Interaction Design field?
- What kind of features, qualities, type of interactivity the possible design could have?
1.6 Knowledge contribution

This project will obtain new information on how to create a support tool for couples. It offers new perspectives on relationships and how they might be enhanced using a game design tool. In particular, a tangible or hybrid game design. There are many more tools made for singles compared to people already being in a relationship, looking for a way to strengthen their bond.

1.7 Concern of Ethics

All personal data gathered for this study was obtained in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). GDPR is a European Union security law that safeguards persons’ sensitive data. Consent is required in order to incorporate information in this study. Names, gender, location, and email addresses, as well as anything else that can be used to identify a person, are kept private. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a European Union (EU) privacy and security law that imposes a number of duties when collecting personal data about EU citizens.
2. Background

The theoretical background of the thesis is described in this chapter. A blend of interaction design studies, therapy information, and what influence gaming can have on relationships. It also has a section in which prior tools are examined.

2.1 Game Design & Relationships

Wang, Taylor and Sun (2018) have investigated how playing video games together can strengthen the bond between families as well as couples. It focuses on the aspect of how gaming can bring parents and children, in other words, different generations together. However, it also mentions how it can strengthen the bond between two people with a romantic relationship. Which is useful research for this particular project. Which, in case they have children, also improves the overall happiness of every member in the family. Closeness in the family relates to a child’s perception of parental warmth and involvement, as well as the interaction between parents and children (Strage, 1998). The degree to which family members, including couples, can converse openly and honestly to one other is referred to as family communication (Olson and Barnes, 2004). A variety of excellent outcomes are linked to good family communication.

Playing video games with your significant other can help communicate more effectively, especially if they have a tough time communicating with each other. A study on intergenerational video game co-playing scenarios by Aarsand (2007), argued that it acted as a resource for interactions and communication. Co-playing video games creates a shared context which allows couples to speak with one another and
share their feelings and opinions.

Even though there has been minimal research explicitly on the advantages of playing video games, the functions and advantages of play in general have been examined for decades. Gaming is one of the most efficient and effective ways for players to develop pleasant emotions (Granic, Lovel & Engels, 2014). Several researchers have found a link between playing a favourite video game and increased mood or feeling pleasant (Ryan, Rigby & Przybylski, 2006).

Furthermore, it has been argued that playing video games might evoke some of the most intense positive emotional experiences (McGonigal, 2011). Partners who spend more time playing video games with each other, had a stronger sense of family connectedness and pleasure, according to a survey of adult Americans. When family members play video games together, this finding suggests that video games can help strengthen relationships and connections in terms of closeness and satisfaction (Wang, Taylor & Sun, 2018).

Relevance

The theory on what playing games together can do for one’s relationship is valuable for this project. It gives a better understanding on how a tool that makes couples interact together in a playful way, can strengthen their relationship.
2.2 Interaction Design & Therapy Tools

2.2.1 Prior tools

This section contains a set of existing tools that are meant for supporting the relationship between couples.

2.2.2 LoveNudge

LoveNudge is an app developed to help understand your partner better, set goals and nudge each other to be more playful (See figure 1).

The app focuses on relationships between couples, with their tagline being: "Relationships – like anything worthwhile – take intentional commitment over time. Like physical fitness, healthy relationships are built on developing healthy habits."

Based on Gary Chapman’s “5 Love Languages,” (Chapman & Campbell, 2016) the app LoveNudge for Couples provides couples with a more modernised way to stimulate and increase their relationship. The book on which the app is based, Chapman’s The 5 Love Languages - The Secret To Love That Lasts. And follows the principle of: different people with different personalities express love in different ways. It suffices to say that when one partner does not feel as loved as the other, tensions, pressure, and miscommunication rise.
Love languages have provided individuals with a means to relate to one another for decades that directly addresses the source of that tension.

Quality time, receiving gifts, words of affirmation, acts of service, and physical touch are all examples of these languages. And they are not just about romantic connections. Studies have proven that habits are crucial to success in all aspects of our lives, including relationships. The LoveNudge app claims to provide knowledge about each language, and wants to establish a framework for forming healthy habits inside the relationship to help it progress. The app includes goal trackers, a love languages quiz, statistics, reminders, and the ability to sync with your partner. This way they can send and receive nudges. After taking the quiz to identify their primary love language, they are able to track their progress in filling up their partner’s love tank and send suggestions (nudges) to guide their partner on how to fill theirs.

Relevance
This application is suitable for this study because it focuses on the relationship between two individuals. Furthermore, the application of the “5 love languages” is inspiring and could possibly also be incorporated in this project. The project’s course and direction will be influenced by understanding more about different ways of loving. It is also interesting watching how they use small goals and assignments to try to deepen the bond between the two users. Although the software is not fully game-like, it does attempt to address difficulties between two lovers by allowing users to “nudge” in a humorous manner. It is also interesting how the application is meant to improve the relationship, trying to make them understand each other better “in real life” using a digital tool.
2.2.3 “Tabletopics Couples”

The concept of the following example is a box of cards containing questions (See figure 2). Each question is unique and can be anything from lighthearted to serious. The website of the game describes it as: ‘‘Questions to challenge and inspire a couple to learn something new about their partner and even themselves. A fun way for couples to create meaningful conversation about the things that make them unique as individuals and the things that bond them as a couple.’’

![Figure 2: the “Tabletopics couples” game](image)

Relevance

The Tabletopics Couples game is an interesting example for this study. The primary goal of this game is to strengthen the connection between two romantic partners. This study’s goal is similar. Discussions on subjects that might not naturally come up so quickly are supported through questions. The aim is to ask questions that you would not ask each other right away. This is a way to help two individuals get to know each other better and to develop the relationship. This can also be used as a component of the project’s final concept.
BetterMe is a game (See figure 3) that encourages players to think and act in order to help them grow and improve their lives, as well as to improve relations between them. It tries to create a positive environment, with players encouraging one another while stepping out of their comfort zones. With some competitive components, this is primarily a cooperative game. Any player may pass on any action or postpone it until a later turn. The makers advise that you have fun and move outside of your comfort zone, where you will experience powerful growth and learning. Even if you will not get points, players can still act on ideas that excite them.

The goal of this game is to inspire you to think of new ways to improve your life. Players receive points by drawing cards and giving their thoughts on a topic or committing to an action that must be completed by a certain date. Every activity that you commit to requires an accountability partner who will both help you stick to your commitment and acknowledge and congratulate your accomplishment.

When a player has completed all of the categories, they can choose a gift and continue playing. When a player that completed all categories and lands on a square that prompts a card draw, they can assign the card draw to any player they want. When the game is over, the players are recommended to put their game sheet somewhere they will see it
every day so they will remember to do their commitments. The game claims to focus on having meaningful conversations with your fellow players and learn about them in ways you would have not learned about them otherwise. The game can assist players in swiftly forming and maintaining relationships. The creator, Dan O’Donnell, says: “I’ve created Better Me to help people, with the hope to leave the world better than I found it. There really is no other game like Better Me. It harnesses the power of learning through play, and challenges people to take specific action to better themselves, while having other players engaged to support and hold them accountable to their commitments.”

Relevance

BetterMe is an interesting example for this project because it follows the same theme as this project, being improving relationships. It is primarily about teamwork, with some elements of rivalry thrown in the mix. It also seeks to incorporate a number of “tangible” features into the game. There are several cards with the topic “tangible,” in which players must complete various tasks with various things. Furthermore, despite the fact that the game is for sale and thus considered commercial, it is also available for free on the website. It is truly intended to assist people and is not viewed as merely a means of profit.
2.3 Tangible Interaction & Games

This section of the study focuses on merging physical and digital elements in games. Also known as hybrid games. The definition of a hybrid game has been far from universal. The term “hybridity” implies a blending of diverse fields of knowledge that are normally unrelated (Oliveira et al., 2020). For example board games and digital. It is an intriguing direction to pursue when creating an interactive therapy tool for couples using game design.

Board games are traditionally played in groups of two or more people. Many board games have a playing surface and rules to facilitate interactions between players. One aspect of physical games, such as boardgames, is the warm atmosphere they foster among friends or family (Zagalo, 2020).

By combining physical components with more sophisticated digital functionality, everyday things can be given new applications and dynamics. According to Ishii & Ulmer (1997): “This change of “painted bits” of GUIs (Graphical User Interfaces) to “tangible bits” by giving physical form to digital information had a significant impact in entertainment industries, since it provides more engaging experiences to its users. Now it is possible to design hybrid games with tangible characteristics in a shared traditional board game.”

Hybrid games give an extra layer to the game that is enhanced not just by digital but also by the player-to-player relationship (Zagalo, 2020).

According to Ajoranta et al., (2016) users are ultimately drawn to the fresh experiences that hybrid products may provide, not the hybridity itself. Therefore, game designers should be aware of the domains they are using and the underlying principles of those domains.
Relevance

A hybrid form of a game allows you to interact with each other while simultaneously providing the benefits of a digital game. Because this project is about strengthening a relationship between two people, it is critical that the tool is not entirely digital. Since an aspect of physical games is the atmosphere it creates and the face-to-face attention. Alternatively, it should encourage people to start doing activities together.

As mentioned before, this project requires a hybrid game. It is crucial that players maintain contact with one another in real life because the game’s goal is to strengthen “real life” relationships with partners. A digital component can significantly improve the gaming experience and encourage frequent play. The playing experience will benefit from the integration of physical and digital elements.
2.4 The importance of playtesting

To help to go forward with a new perspective, playtesters are people who play your game and give feedback on the experience. It is important to playtest the game to determine if it functions the way it should, as well as if players enjoy it and stick with it. According to Fullerton et al. (2004) it is important to discuss your expectations with your playtesters in advance and also indicate that if they lose interest, they are not obliged to play until the end. Playtest sessions help to see how players engage with your design. It is crucial to avoid giving out too much information, making assumptions, or trying to correct the participants. This method enables the opportunity to quickly modify the design, in response to the comments about the test. Heuristics are used to assess the usability and playability of games, similar to how the design phase aids the usability specialist in identifying the many usability and playability difficulties (Desurvire & Caplan & Toth, 2004).

Relevance

It is crucial to comprehend the benefits of playtests for this project. Testing is essential because this will be a hybrid game that combines a board game with an application. Even though the gamedesigner spends a lot of time analyzing the game, it is still important to let other people examine it as well. You will never play the game as someone who first tries it and who needs to figure everything out for themselves.
3. Methodology

This chapter elaborates and explains the methodology choices made throughout the thesis. Firstly, it will be mentioned by what methodology this project is inspired. After this, an overview of all different methods that have been used is given and explained how they were applied in this project.

3.1 Project plan

The methodology of Design Thinking has been used to inspire this project (See figure 5). There are five phases to this approach (Wolnak, 2017). Design Thinking can be defined as a non-linear, interactive process. It is utilised to define challenges and come up with novel ideas that will be prototyped and tested. The Design Thinking Toolbox is a book that contains a variety of strategies that can be utilised at various stages of the Design Thinking process (Lewrick et al., 2020).

![Figure 5: The 5 Design Thinking Phases](image)

**Empathise**

Empathy is the first phase of the Design Thinking Method. This entails cultivating empathy for all parties involved in a complex topic. The purpose of this phase is to let go of preconceptions and prejudices, and to establish the groundwork for a solution that prioritises people.
This can be accomplished by being present in all stakeholders’ physical environments or by conducting interviews with open-ended questions. At this point, it’s critical to acquire as much information as possible (Wolnak, 2017). For this phase literature review and a questionnaire have been applied for this particular project.

**Define**

The knowledge obtained during the empathy phase will be used during the Design Thinking Methods defining phase. The available data will be evaluated with the goal of identifying a core issue. Whereas the empathy phase is primarily concerned with gathering as much information as possible, the definition phase is concerned with bringing all of that information together (Wolnak, 2017). A Word Cloud and semi-structured interview has been applied in this phase.

**Ideate**

The ideation phase is the third phase of the Design Thinking Methodology. The goal of this phase is to come up with as many solutions as possible to the main problem. The next phase will be to come up with solutions now that we have a better grasp of all people involved and have defined a core problem. As a result, the strategies used in this phase are geared toward producing as many ideas as possible. After that, methods are chosen to compare and select the finest of the ideas generated. This phase concludes with a solution direction for the main problem (Wolnak, 2017). An individual brainstorm, online design workshop and cardsorting has been applied in this phase.

**Prototype**

Several low-cost, simpler variants of the solution will be developed
during the prototype phase. The goal of this phase is to find the best potential answer through trial and error. The ultimate result of this phase is a positive sense about the solution’s limitations, open ends, and how others involved would react, both emotionally and behaviorally, if the solution were to be adopted (Wolnak, 2017). The creation of low-fidelity and high-fidelity wireframes has happened in this phase. As well as creating an interactive clickable prototype in Figma.

Test
The testing of the product is the final step in the Design Thinking Method. Although this is the final stage of the design process, it is not always the end. Because Design Thinking is an iterative process, the test phase frequently yields a significant amount of data for earlier stages. For example, the problem may be redefined, or you may gain new user insights, necessitating a change in the problem’s solution (Wolnak, 2017). The Wizard of Oz method has been applied during this final phase of the project.

The precise methods used during the five phases will be further discussed in the following section.

3.2 Empathise

3.2.1 Literature review
The study of literature is an important component of this project. It is critical to conduct research and write a summary on a given issue. It can assist in providing an outline of a topic with which you are unfamiliar. It might also help you come up with new ideas for your own research. It also aids in determining where existing research
has flaws or difficulties (Knopf, 2006). A literature search entails sifting through published sources and capturing the essence of earlier research. This data may be useful in the current project (Hanington, Martin, 2019).

For this project the literature review focuses on the connection between game design and relationships, prior tools and tangible interaction and games.

### 3.2.2 Survey: Questionnaire

Surveys aid in gaining a better sense of how people view their past relationships. They can be utilised to discover more about a person’s positive and negative experiences during a relationship. Surveys offer the advantage of allowing for quick responses, which is beneficial for projects with a shorter timeline (Sue, Ritter, 2012). They are also a low-cost option to conduct research because they can be distributed for free online. This allows a huge audience to be reached, regardless of their location (Ilieva, Baron & Healey, 2002). A survey can be used to gather factual information such as age and gender, as well as views, attitudes, and impressions (Rowley, 2014).

The survey for this project was based around personal perspectives on relationships, figuring out what is seen as positive and negative. And to see if people would be interested in using a relationship tool, and what functions it could have.

### 3.3 Define

#### 3.3.1 Word Cloud

A word cloud is a graphic depiction of qualitative data collected
from research. Words that have been used more frequently, could for example, stand out visually and have been put more emphasis on. This way it is simple to discover which features stand out. It is simple to discover which features stand out at a glance. The word’s size shows how frequently it has been used. The magnitude of the words shows how frequently the other terms appear. “They can be utilised for storing transcripts, the visual markers of each cloud generate a gestalt unique to each transcript and help in its memory,” Hanington and Martin (2019) write.

For this project, a World Cloud is used to give an overview of the data gathered in the questionnaire. Showing what aspects have been mentioned the most.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interview

Listening to people, paying attention, and being open are all important aspects of a well-run semi-structured interview. For this assignment, semi-structured interviews are a suitable choice because they allow you to ask specific questions. Interviews, according to Hannabuss (1996), allow respondents to give their own perspectives and study how individuals collaborate. It also allows the researcher to discover the motivations behind particular decisions and obtain an understanding of them. The disadvantage of unstructured interviews is that the topics mentioned may not be directly relevant to the study question (Yehl, 2009).

During this project a semi-structured interview with a relationship therapist is conducted to gain more insight in relationship and therapy.
3.4 Ideate

3.4.1 Individual brainstorm

Ideas are generated in a group regarding a certain problem or topic through the collection and sharing of thoughts. The format of a brainstorming session is determined by the purpose. People at a brainstorming session are assumed to develop more creative thoughts and subsequently generate solutions in a ‘normal’ fashion. Because few rules apply in brainstorming meetings and the voicing of all thoughts and ideas is encouraged, Osborn (1963) thinks that people will develop fewer ideas under “normal” circumstances than they would in a brainstorming session.

Although group brainstorming is perhaps more successful in generating ideas than traditional group problem solving, research has shown that individual brainstorming often generates better and more ideas than group brainstorming (Lamm & Trommsdorff, 1973).

The ideation phase for this project was kicked off with an individual brainstorm, to create different design solutions and ideas.

3.4.2 (Online) design workshop

Hanington and Martin (2019) define design workshops as “efficient, convincing, fun approaches to win the creative trust and contribution of stakeholders through activity-based research.” The design workshop will be done through the platform Miro, considering not all participants are in the same geographical location. Miro is an “online whiteboard”, which allows users to write on online post-it notes and upload photos and emojis.
For this project, an online workshop with 4 sets of couples was held, using methods such as an icebreaker and brainwriting to expand further on ideas previously created.

3.4.3 Card sorting

According to Hanington and Martin (2019), ‘Card sorting is a participatory design technique that you can use to explore how participants group items into categories and relate concepts to one another, whether for digital interface design or a table of contents.’

Information is clustered by participants and what the information architecture can look like such that it fulfils the respondents’ expectations using card sorting. This is accomplished via a set of cards that contain (sub)categories and material that the participants are free to organise. Card sorting can be done in a variety of ways. The versions have slight differences, although they are mostly the same.

- **Closed card sorting:** participants sort the cards they have and do not change this
- **Open card sorting:** participants can edit, delete, add and create their own categories
- **Online card sorting:** using online tools to perform a card sorting
- **Card sorting with think aloud:** participants explain why they order certain things
- **Group card sorting:** several participants discuss the sorting of the cards at the same time

According to Hanginton and Martin (2019) the best way of assisting the practices in a good card sort have; a moderator who is familiar with the subject, as well as participants who are the content’s target audience and are interested in the information. You can work with
individuals or small groups of participants iteratively.

For this project a version of (online) closed card sorting is applied to figure out what ideas previously generated are the most promising.

### 3.4.4 Sketching

Making sketches is one of the initial steps in the design process. According to Buxton (2011), sketching can be done with pen and paper or with a variety of other materials. “The key here is to recognize that sketching, in the sense that I mean it, is more about exercising the imagination and understanding, than it is about the materials employed,” he says. He also notes that the sketches do not need to be elaborate or detailed. Some of the keywords he associates with sketching include minimalist, swiftly constructed, and throwaway. Sketching will be a useful tool for guiding the design process.

For this project sketching was used to get a better understanding of what the chosen design direction could look like.

### 3.5 Prototype

#### 3.5.1 Prototyping

“Prototyping is the tangible creation of artefacts at various levels of resolution, for development and testing of ideas inside design teams as well as with clients and consumers,” according to Martin & Hanington (2012). They can be used to improve design thinking and communication (Houde & Hill, 1997). Martin and Hanington (2012) divide design prototypes into two categories based on their fidelity level: low-fidelity and high-fidelity prototypes. Low-fidelity prototypes, which are used for internal development, are prevalent in
the early stages of the brainstorming process. High-fidelity prototypes are more refined, closely resembling the final product in terms of appearance and functioning.

For this project, low-fidelity and high-fidelity frames are created. These are then used to create an interactive clickable prototype. There will also be some physical prototyping, creating the tangible aspects of the tool.

3.6 Test

3.6.1 Wizard of Oz
On the surface, a Wizard of Oz prototype appears to work, however the technology is really mimicked, for example because it is handled by hand or digitally controlled. This allows the ‘user experience’ to be addressed without the product being technically complete. According to Hanington & Martin (2019) say: ‘’The research session setup requires that the participant be in one location, and the researcher who plays the “wizard” in another. To aid in the process of preparing an appropriate, timely system response, the researcher must be able to observe participant activity (either through video or screen-sharing software).’’

In this project, the Wizard of Oz method is used during usertesting. Because the final concept is a hybrid, combining digital and virtual, mimicking that it was already fully functioning was necessary.

3.6.2 Playtesting
Blind playtesting is letting people test your game without being present, or at least without providing input on how the game should
work. In this case the testers have to figure out for themselves how the game should work based on the game components and the rule book (Hanington & Martin, 2019).

For this project, a prolonged play testing session was conducted. One couple was given a prototype of the design along with instructions to engage with the game each day for a week. They were encouraged to answer a couple questions about the prototype each day in a journal that was given to them. On the final day they were asked to answer some questions about their overall experience.
4. Design Process

The design process for this project will be described in this chapter. This is accomplished by going through the completion of the five design thinking phases.

4.1 Empathise

4.1.1 Literature review

The results of the literature research can be found in chapter 2. By comparing different sources, insights were gained about how game design can affect the relationships between couples. It showed how by playing together, two people can strengthen their bond and become more familiar with each other. Additionally, a look has been taken at Interaction Design and existing therapy tools. To provide an overview of what elements were utilised in previous tools and how they were executed exactly. Lastly, research has been conducted about Tangible Interaction and Game Design. It discovered the area of hybrid games and showed that combining the digital with tangibility has various advantages.

4.1.2 Survey: Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire was to have a better understanding of the various sorts of connections people in relationships have. Specifically, which features they find positive and which they find negative. It will aid in determining the specific scope of the problem. They are also asked whether they have utilised relationship tools with their spouse before, as well as if they have gone through relationship therapy and how the experience was.
The method

The questionnaire consisted of a combination of closed and open questions (See Appendix 1). These questions were focused around people's relationships and their personal experience with them. For this reason, everyone who filled in the survey, was in a relationship currently or has been in one previously.

Although the questionnaires were administered anonymously, participants were given the option of leaving their email address in case they wanted to participate further in the research or provide feedback later on. There was no collection of sensitive information.

Results

The survey was completed by 53 participants, 66.7% being female, 31.5% male and 1.9% identified as other. Out of the 53 replies, two participants have been to relationship therapy. The results of the survey can be found in Appendix 1. The results have been categorised into the following themes: positive aspects from (previous) relationships, negative aspects from (previous) relationships, relationship therapy, relationship tools and functions.

Positive aspects from (previous) relationships

The aspects that were mentioned by most people were good communication and trust. Many mentioned that being able to have fun together and have inside jokes makes the relationship a positive experience. One of the responses was: "Trust, good communication, fun together, being able to be together but also separate, easy to hang out with, no need to talk all the time, comfortable with each other, nice to each other." Which corresponds to another’s response: "Great communication, respect for each other’s boundaries and private time,"
trust in each other, always comfortable around each other.‘’ The aspects of what makes a relationship a good one, seems to be quite similar for a lot of different people.

Negative aspects from (previous) relationships

Opposed to good communication, bad communication is the most common aspect of a relationship that can make it feel negative. On top of that, a lack of understanding, general stress, different life goals and not cleaning up after themselves are also negative aspects that were mentioned several times. As one person said: ‘’He is a bit messy and sometimes we don’t understand each other, for example in planning stuff together or organising our home.’’

Relationship therapy

Only two of the respondents mentioned trying out relationship therapy before. They did not go into a lot of detail but did say that it was a negative experience for them and did not help them much.

Relationship tools

Many people had an experience with trying some type of relationship tool. Often mentioned were card games, playing games on a laptop, board games (for example, Ego). Besides that some play Co-op multiplayer games on Steam or Nintendo Switch. Another person mentioned they played It takes Two, which also inspired this project. ‘’We played ‘’it takes two’’ on the Xbox one, which was a really fun experience for us. The story follows a divorcing couple going through their history in the relationship and sort of mending it. We have not finished it yet so I don’t know the ending, but it made us realise the importance of keeping your partner’s perspective in mind, how to cooperate and communicate and to love or strengths and
Functions

A question regarding what type of functions users would like to be able to have in a relationship tool. Some functions that came up were questions cards, daily missions, tips, new activities, date ideas. As one mentioned: “Thoughtful question cards, maybe games you play together instead of against each other.” As well as: “Something that creates fun friction between us, complicated questions or games that explore things that we don’t normally know or explore about each other.” Another person mentioned something for the real world, which makes you do things outside.

This survey has provided a clearer view on relationships, including potential negative and positive features and how couples would hope to reconnect. The full survey responses included several directions and potential functions. The following phases will continue to work with these results.
4.2 Define

4.2.1 Word Cloud
A Word Cloud (See figure 6) shows readers which words are important and how they relate to one another in a single image. A Word cloud is frequently more interesting than a dry summary of answers provided within a specific study. The cloud displays how frequently words appear in qualitative data and creates an overview of complex data. This provides insight into the data and invites thinking of new propositions.

In this case, the responses to the questionnaire were turned into a word cloud. This makes it simple to see which components of the participants’ responses are most frequently mentioned. This demonstrates the need for a mix of serious and lighthearted elements. Furthermore, the ability to ask each other personal and crucial questions is frequently noted. The use of cards, and also the need to do activities together were mentioned various times.

4.2.2 Interview with a relationship therapist
An interview was conducted with a 31 year old couple therapist, who is based in The Netherlands.

Motivation
This interview was conducted In order to get a better understanding of what couples therapy exactly entails. It also offers a better
understanding of the issues that couples frequently face and when they decide to seek therapy.

The method in detail
To summarise, an interview was conducted through Zoom with a duration of around an hour. The interviewee has agreed and provided written consent to participate in this interview. They have consented to a synopsis of the interview that could be included in the documentation, including gender and age. Notes were taken during the interview to be able to write a short summary. The questions asked can be found in Appendix 2.

Results
The results are categorized into the five following themes: role of a relationship therapist, reasons to go to relationship therapy, average clients, effectiveness of relationship therapy, methods used during relationship therapy.

Role of a relationship therapist
The goal of a relationship therapist is to help couples better understand their relationship problems and reach out for help if they are no longer able to do so on their own. If the case requires it, the therapist may also see partners separately. Normally counselling together will resume later. Arguments, disputes, and intense emotions are all part of the job. Relationship therapy is therefore significantly more intensive than individual therapy since it investigates not one, but two, opposing experiences. During couples therapy, a couples therapist must be able to see the nuances in the relationships between two spouses. They therapist needs to be able to handle various prejudices. Many couples in treatment blame each other for their difficulties and attempt to
persuade the therapist that they are correct. That is a significant source of conflict.

**Reasons to go to relationship therapy**

Relationships are one of the most significant ways to learn about yourself, the other person, and life in general. Here, mistakes are made from time to time. It covers the violation of agreements in relationships, for example. However, frequently we learn new things about ourselves, and the other person, as a result of relationship problems. The very least that people can gain out of conversations is to learn something about themselves that they can use in present or future relationships and situations.

**Average clients**

The average age lies between 25 and 55 years old. What makes the task so enjoyable is the contrasts and commonalities of those various people and their interactions. It depends on how long they have been together. People are more prone to seek couples counselling when they are younger. They also come in at an earlier point in their relationship.

**Effectiveness of relationship therapy**

During therapy couples will be engaged in serious and worthwhile discussions. Couples therapy is beneficial as long as partners learn about themselves, one other, and their relationship, and see how this benefits them all. It can not be promised whether or not people should stay together, sometimes it is better to break up. You never know if you will still be together after a year, three years, or five years. However having connection dialogues are valuable and hence effective as long as people are committed and are willing to invest time and effort. People who receive good couples therapy are more likely to stay
to stay together.

**Methods used during relationship therapy**

Most couples therapists use a combination of scientifically proven techniques from various couples therapy movements. When it comes to relationships, behavioural therapy, for example, focuses on communication and problem-solving skills, as well as making partners aware of how much their own behaviour influences the behaviour of the other. This strategy focuses on the present, rather than the past, and assigns homework assignments to couples, such as doing something pleasant for each other every day or practising listening to each other. Cognitive behavioural therapy focuses on your relationship’s false expectations and incorrect assumptions, and teaches you how to replace them with more realistic and pleasant attitudes. Other, more recent, and possibly a more effective school of thought Integrative Behavioural Couples Therapy (IBCT), which focuses on accepting partners’ differences and affective reconstruction, assumes that wrong patterns may have developed in previous relationships, leading to the development of defences. Your past is also reviewed in greater depth in this therapy of treatment.

The relationship therapist’s interview gave additional insight on relationships, why getting treatment is taboo, and what methods relationship therapists utilise. It also pointed out the most important aspects of having a healthy relationship, and the importance of learning about your partner as well as yourself.

**4.3 Ideate**

The goal of this phase was to develop a solution that reconnects partners in relationships with one another. Some directions have
already emerged from the previous research and will be pursued further. In this phase a variety of ideation methods will be used. The initial step is to begin diverging. That means coming up with a wide range of potential solutions and ideas without worrying about whether they are good enough.

4.3.1 Individual brainstorming

Individual brainstorming is the first method used during the ideation phase.

Motivation

As previously stated, research has shown that an individual brainstorm frequently produces more and more effective results compared to group brainstorming (Lamm & Trommsdorff, 1973). The brainstorm was inspired by the research that has been conducted, meaning the literature review as well as the surveys.

The method in detail

This brainstorming process began with the creation of a Causes Canvas (See figure 7). This defines the target group, the problem that needs to be solved, as well as other factors that influence the problem. From the different factors, one main problem is picked and placed in the middle of the following Ideas Canvas (See figure 8). Various solutions for the problem are then created and placed around the problem in the canvas. Normally, the solutions are then sorted, but in this case, the potential solutions are used in a co-design workshop with couples during the next method.

Results

The brainstorming session was beneficial because it generated several
potential solution directions. From a board game to a dating simulator. And from a tool specially made for goal setting and activity planning to using and sending audios between different couples. These ideas will be used during the design workshop to further develop them together and then decide which one is most suitable for the problem.

Figure 7: Causes Canvas

Figure 8: Ideas Canvas
4.3.2 (Online) Design workshop

As mentioned before, the next step in the diverging process was an (online) design workshop.

The method in detail

Four sets of couples have been invited to join an online design workshop on the Miro platform. The participants were gathered through the survey that has been conducted before. Because the participants were in different locations/countries, the workshop was run through Miro. Participants agreed that a summary of their responses would be included in the project thesis.

Icebreaker

Using an icebreaker game, whether the group knows each other or not, is a great way to get everyone relaxed and ready to start working (Panke & Harth, 2019). An icebreaker is an activity, teaching method, or game used to welcome participants in a brainstorming session and start a conversation. For this workshop, participants were asked to fill in one of the icebreaker boards beforehand.

During the workshop they introduced themselves to each other by choosing an avatar for themselves, telling us about their first date together and adding a picture of their favourite date location. The icebreaker canvas can be seen in figure 9.

Figure 9: Icebreaker
Brainwriting

Brainwriting is proposed as an alternative to brainstorming. It is the silent, written generation of ideas by a group. According to VanGundy (1984), this approach is similar to brainstorming in that each member of a group puts down his or her unique thoughts before discussing them with the rest of the group. However, as the group discusses the numerous inventive ideas, these accessible ideas might blossom into highly creative ideas.

The type of brainwriting used in this workshop is called Brainwriting Pool (See figure 10). In which the group leader informs the participants about the problem statement, and in this case the previously generated solution directions will be shared. Then all participants get time to adjust, add, or associate further on the ideas. When they are finished they will exchange their ideas and continue working on them together. Members list additional suggestions after being stimulated by the thoughts of the other members. This procedure is repeated for approximately 20 to 30 minutes (VanGundy, 1984).
Results

The brain writing approach provided various directions that may be chosen to find an efficient solution. The ideas previously generated through the individual brainstorm were explored further and became this:

**click through game / date each other through this game, learn more about each others answers**

- real life situations simulator, how would you each deal with the situation
- go on online virtual dates together
- play together and discuss how you would react in the simulator
- play against each other, try to steal dates from the other person

**use voice-messages to talk to other couples / share problems / listen to them with your partner**

- you can listen to them with your partner and discuss what you would do in that situation
- voting polls on who is right or wrong
- could be for long distance couples
- leave each other voice messages and you have to answers questions correctly to listen to them

**hybrid game where you use your phone, go outside to play in the real world. spend time together**

- you have to solve challenges together, outside, it is impossible to do them on your own
- something like pokemon go where you have to look for things together
- hide and seek where you have to find each other by giving clues
• challenges you have to do during dates outdoors

dating simulator / therapy simulator, what would your partner pick, predicting, guessing etc.
• have a virtual therapist ask you relationship questions
• play with a real therapist
• you play as a therapist for other couples who shares their issues

take care of each others avatars digitally
• feed each others avatars by going on dates together
• the avatar gets sick when you are fighting
• you can feed the avatars by answering questions right about each other
• newlywed game / can you predict the right answer

games similar to board games, with goals (like if we set a certain score we should go on trip)
• a game that never ends, the board is always set up and its part of daily life
• when you are away from the board you can continue playing on your phone
• maybe it’s normal to wait a while in between turns, (like wordfeud)
• it gives you suggestions for dates

hybrid board game / digital elements
• a board game where you have to build something together, like a jenga tower, but more meaningful
• playing together IRL affects something on your phone
• visualisation of your love
• flowers will bloom when you are spending more time together

**media storage (organised in timeline for memories)**

• personalised throwback videos (similar to the ones you get on your iphone)
• reminds you to take pictures of dates / activities you do together
• shows you a photo and quizzes you both on the location, date etc.
• reminds you to go on dates and shows locations

### 4.3.3 Cardsorting

**The method in detail**

After several ideas have been generated during the previous methods, the cardsorting method has been used to converge. Individual sessions were held with three participants to sort cards. On each card is one of the previously generated ideas. It was up to the participants to rank the ideas from the best, to least promising, or in other words, which ideas they were most likely to use or be interested in. The card sorting that took place was a combination of online and closed card sorting. Meaning the platform Miro was used to sort the cards, with participants sorting the cards they had and are not able to change or adjust them.

**Results**

All three cards were ordered in a different order by the participants (See figure 11), but three concepts were clearly preferred. Firstly, **games comparable to board games with goals, where if a specific score is set, they should go on a date somewhere together.** Secondly, **media storage arranged in a timeline for memories.** And finally, one card that was among the most promising ideas was a **hybrid game**
where you can play on your phone, or you have to take it outside in the real world.

4.3.4 Sketching

Buxton’s (2011) approach of sketching was the next method in the ideation process. These sketches aid with the visualisation and ideation of ideas that led to the final design.

The method in detail

According to Buxton, sketching can be done in various ways, and does not have to be detailed or precise. In fact he recommends, quickly done, fast and easy sketches. These sketches aid with the visualisation and ideation of ideas that lead to the final design.
Results

Several sketches have been made of a tool using gamedesign that is part virtual and part physical (See figure 12). By means of the sketching, a concrete concept has been created that can be worked out in the next phase, prototyping. This concept is described in detail in the next section.

Figure 12: Various sketches and doodles
4.3.5 Design direction

The concept chosen is a game called LoveTree, that aims to strengthen the bond between two people in a relationship. This is accomplished by giving various activities, dates, and questions for them to ask each other. The concept has evolved into a hybrid game. Meaning that it is partially physical and partly digital. This was selected because having face-to-face elements in the game is vital; it will intensify the link between two individuals, which would be difficult to do when the entire game is digital. The digital aspect is there to create a visualisation of the progress that has been made as well as a time-line with memories.

Board

A walking path with pawn spaces will be seen on the game board. The game is not about being the first to arrive; this route is unending. It is about working together on the activities that have been assigned to you and having better conversations with your partner.

Cards

The squares on the board game will refer to different categories of cards. The three categories are: personal questions, activities you can do together at home and activities you can do outside as a date. The question cards provide an opportunity to engage in conversation and discuss things that might not normally be discussed so quickly. The questions on these cards will be inspired by the book 201 Relationship Questions: The couples guide to building trust and emotional intimacy (Davenport, 2015)

App

The digital portion of the game focuses mainly on visualising the
progress in the relationship. This is done by means of a “Love Tree”. Each time the players draw the “leaf” card, the aim is for the couple to perform the named outdoor activity. This must be captured with a photograph, which is then displayed on the app’s chronological timeline. Each of these memories is then put as a new leaf to the digital “Love Tree.” Adding more photos, makes the LoveTree grow more branches and enlarge in size.

Furthermore, the application estimates how often you should move the pawn on the board. This is determined by how frequently the couples aim to go on dates. The players are then notified to move the pawn one place forward, depending on their input.

4.4 Prototype

The next step was to start working on the prototype after deciding on the design direction. The prototype consists of physical as well as a digital aspects. For the digital tool, low-fidelity and high-fidelity wireframes are created. You can simply keep track of how many pages (or types of pages) a site or application has by using wireframes. This also makes it clear how these pages are connected. A wireframe may frequently be changed more quickly than a completely created visual design or a page that has already been coded. Wireframes’ simplistic design allows for early alterations that might otherwise be significantly more complicated or time consuming later in the project (Lloyd, 2009).

The following features are included in the prototype:

• the feature to log in or sign up for a new account
• a feature to connect your profile with your partner
• the option to change the settings (turn notifications on/off etc)
• you can plant your “LoveTree” with your partner
4.4.1 Low-fidelity wireframes

The prototype process began with the creation of low-fidelity wireframes (See figure 13). According to Loyd (2009) a wireframe is the schematic framework for a website, app, or page. It is essentially a construction sketch. Wireframes are used to provide all of the objects and functions on a screen a logical location without being “distracted” by visual elements. As a result, wireframes exclude colour, typographic style, imagery, and drawings, focusing instead on content function, behaviour, and hierarchy. In other words, the purpose of a screen is more important than its appearance.
4.4.2 High-fidelity wireframes

The low-fidelity wireframes are then turned into high-fidelity wireframes (See figure 14). High-fidelity wireframes contain more details, such as with actual headlines, body text, button texts and colour, logos and photos (Buxton, 2012). High-fidelity prototypes are more refined, often matching the look and feel of the final product.
4.4.3 Figma prototype

The next phase was to construct an interactive clickable version of the prototype after the style and frames were determined. An interactive prototype provides a clearer understanding of what the application will accomplish and how it will work. This means that you can navigate between different pages and items, such as a functional navigation or action buttons. This may even include creating animations and complex interactivity in a wireframe. The user-friendliness and experience can be assessed in this way. These wireframes are partly functional prototypes, hence they can no longer be printed on paper. The prototype was created in Figma (See figure 15), which was chosen since it is a user-friendly tool. The Figma app can also be used to test the prototype directly on devices. The final version of the prototype can be found in Chapter 5.

![Figure 15: Figma prototype overview](image)
4.4.4 Physical prototype

The current physical prototype (See figure 16) contains 48 cards. There are 3 types of cards, namely a card containing: a personal question regarding the relationship, an activity to do indoors and a date idea to do outside the house. Each of these categories are visualised with a symbol and different colour schemes. The playing field is made of a magnetic board, which makes it easy to put away but still have it in eyesight. It can be hung on metal surfaces, such as a refrigerator. The heart-shaped pawn that moves across the playing field is also magnetic. The playing field consists of fourteen squares, each with a symbol. The symbols refer to the three categories on the cards. The design of the board and all the cards can be found in Appendix 3.

Figure 16: Physical prototype
4.5 Test

4.5.1 Wizard of Oz

LoveTree was tested in the final phase of this project. Requesting feedback is essential because it ensures that the concept matches the target audience as well as possible.

Method in detail

Two different participants who are currently in a relationship (not with each other) provided their feedback on the physical parts of the game as well as the digital aspects. Because the project was just ten weeks long, it was not possible to give the game to a couple for extended testing. As a result, feedback on the concept, its development, and the many features of the game was the focus of the test.

The prototypes of the physical board and cards were shown to the participants. The application was displayed on a phone through the Figma application (See figure 17). The Wizard of Oz technique (Hanington & Martin, 2019) was used to demonstrate what the application’s functions exactly entail, and how it relates to the physical elements of the game.

![Figure 17: Application being shown on phone](attachment:image.png)
Results

Concept
The participants were pleased with the concept, they said that they thought it was an interesting game and they would like to try it for a longer period of time. Only then would they be able to give a full opinion about the operation and overall feel of the game. Especially the growing of the tree, which is a visualisation of the love between two people, they found a nice metaphor with meaning.

Board
A number of suggestions have been made about the game board that are valuable. It emerged that it might be a good idea to make the entire walking route from magnetic pieces. This way they can structure the route themselves. Which means that the players can choose how often they want to answer a question, do indoor activities or go on dates. This allows players to customise the game to their preferences, which will better suit their lifestyle.

Cards
The questions on the cards were well received by the participants. They agreed with each other that these kind of personal questions are important topics in a relationship, but that they are seldom discussed. However, it came up that if you wish to utilise LoveTree on a daily basis, a huge number of question cards will be required. It was therefore suggested that a large number of question cards should be added, as well as a significant number of blank cards. The couples can then fill up the cards themselves with questions they want to ask each other.
Application

It was clear to the participants that they were testing a prototype, and not a fully developed functional app. By means of the Wizard of Oz method it was still possible to show the app’s concept. In general, they were positive about the app. The design and user flow seem to be right. And they navigated through the frames with ease. There were some comments about the font size on some frames, which has been adjusted and made bigger so that it is easier to read them. Another comment about the clickable area on the arrow to go back to the previous frame being too small, has been enlarged, since it took the participants a few taps on a few occasions to have it react the way it should.

4.5.2 Playtesting

A prolonged playtesting session was conducted with a couple. They were encouraged to engage with the prototype daily, for one week.

Method in detail

A prototype of the game, including an instruction, was given to a couple to test for one week. LoveTree is a game that requires to be tested for multiple days, considering it is an ongoing game, where you play for a short amount of time each day. They were given a notebook that functioned as a “diary”, containing some daily questions as well as overall feedback questions that had to be answered after the one week period. These questions can be found in Appendix 4. The application was not tested during this playtesting session, considering it needs to be manually controlled by the designer in order for it to work fully. However, the players received a text each day, telling them to move to pawn forward, and how many places. This was a substitute for the application during this playtesting session.
Results

Concept

The results of this lengthier playtest generally coincided with the results of the previous round of feedback during the Wizard of Oz session. The couple was positive about the concept itself, a game that can be played for a little bit each day. During the test week, the couple acknowledged that they used LoveTree nearly daily. They once spent the entire day away from home, so they lacked the time and focus necessary to play it. They said it was not an issue for the duration of the game and they picked it back up the next day. They valued the everyday bonding experience they had while playing this game. They also got answers to questions they had never considered asking each other themselves.

Board

The couple expressed satisfaction with the board and the design. The overall look and aesthetic was calming and did not clash with the environment of their house. They enjoyed the fact that it could be put away easily due to the magnetic aspect of the board. The suggestion to attach it to the refrigerator was their own (See figure 18). It was mentioned that they would have liked a holder, designed to hold the cards as well. Currently the cards do not have a specific way to be stored.

Figure 18: The LoveTree board attached to refrigerator
Cards

The couple was pleased with the majority of the cards. They experience some valuable dialogues, taking them out of the daily routine and felt truly connected. Occasionally a card did not quite match the situation. For example, an activity that was not available nearby and could not be performed. It was also mentioned that some of the activities required to pay an entrance fee, for example going to the cinema. Thus, the degree to which certain activities cost money might well be considered. In the event that the card was not appropriate, the users themselves decided to take another card. They suggested that the players can choose to take another card from the deck if it is not suitable for them. During this test, it also emerged again that it would be a good idea to add blank cards that can be filled in as desired.

Feedback

In conclusion, when there was no time to play LoveTree, it was not considered a problem and resumed without issue the following day. The cards were well received, but more consideration should have been given to the cost of some activities. The participants expressed a need for a card holder as well as the ability to customize the deck by adding cards with their own ideas. The concept appealed to them, and interesting conversations have started between the two, due to the interesting and valuable question cards.
5. Main result & Final design

5.1 Main result
This project’s design process was an enjoyable and informative experience. The main result is a tool that can help couples strengthen their relationship through game design. In addition, the goal was to create a game that was both virtual and physical, based on previous conducted research. Furthermore, the game’s usage of personal questions that couples can ask one other was deemed a positive element that should be included.

5.2 Concept
LoveTree is a game made for people who are in a relationship. They can utilize the game to get to know one another better or to solidify their current relationship. A physical board with pawn, cards with several categories, and a virtual area on an app make up this hybrid game. After the application is set up, a notification that the pawn has to be moved on the board is delivered every day or a certain number of days, depending on the preferences of the couple.

There are three potential categories where the pawn could land. If it lands on a question square, the couple takes a question card and discuss the question with each other.

In addition, the pawn can end up on an indoor activity, or an outdoor activity/date. The couple is encouraged to take a photo as a memory of their outdoor activity/date. This will then be uploaded into the LoveTree application. Here, their visual “LoveTree” will keep expanding and eventually create a chronologic timeline of all the photographs and memories that have already been experienced.
The experience of playing LoveTree strengthens relationships between couples. Sometimes difficult conversations will emerge. They will need to give each other feedback and point out areas where their connection may be strengthened. However, the game also focuses on the aspects that are strong in the relationship.

LoveTree is not intended to be just serious and profound, though. There will be a fun element to it thanks to the activities and dates. Couples will be encouraged to spend time together at home or go out together more frequently. The “LoveTree” on the app, which they can see visually grow, shows that the couple is making an effort to improve their relationship. As more time and attention is given to each other, a large Love Tree loaded with memorable moments forms.

5.3 Sources & inspiration for the cards

The game contains different types of cards. The cards contain three different categories. Personal questions, indoor activities and outdoor activities. The personal questions are inspired by the book: “201 Relationship Questions: The Couple’s Guide to Building Trust and Emotional Intimacy (Davenport, 2015)”. This book has been utilized for its relationship knowledge because this is not the main expertise of this project. The generated activities/dates on the cards are based on conversations with people in relationships, they were asked which activities/dates they like to do together.

5.4 Final Design

A concept overview can be found on the following pages. It includes the physical aspects of the LoveTree game, such as the gameboard, cards and pawn. As well as the digital aspect, the app, which will be shown frame by frame explaining how the user should use it.
Link to video of the Figma prototype: https://youtu.be/-UTCkew80bY
Link to the Figma prototype: https://bit.ly/LoveTreeRB
LoveTree is planted, user has to water it and a short introduction text is shown.

Connect with your partner after signing up.

Settings / how often do you want to play etc.

Log In Page

Sign Up page

Loading screen

An animation of a tree growing from the seed is shown.
The user can create their first "memory leaf" for the LoveTree as part of the intro.

A photo and caption can be added to the "memory leaf".

Adding memory leaves to the tree makes it grow and expand, you can scroll horizontally watching it grow through the time you keep playing.

Two examples of memory leaves. They are opened by clicking on the specific leaf on the tree.
The LoveTree app notifies you when to move the pawn forward, according to your own preferences.

A magnetic game board with magnetic pawn, easy to put away but still have in sight.

48 cards with 3 different categories

This symbol is on cards that contain an activity to do together inside the house.

This symbol is on cards that contain a personal question about the relationship.

This symbol is on cards that contain a date activity to do outdoors. These can be captured as memory leaves on the LoveTree app, to grow your LoveTree.

It is time to move your pawn one place forward on the LoveTree gameboard!

Remind me later

Done!
6. Discussion

Methodology

This project’s design process was interesting and an informative experience. Starting with a survey offered me a clear picture of people’s relationships. As a result, a number of recommendations for how individuals might reconnect in a relationship had already emerged from the surveys. In this project I was able to employ various methods that I had never used before. For example, I have learned that cardsorting is effective for making decisions and settling on a concept.

The methodology I chose, Design Thinking, is in general, more applicable in a commercial setting. It is typically used when trying to construct something when it is not clear what people truly need, to then determine later in the process, which problem and target audience the design is meant to address. In order to prevent this, I made a conscious effort to identify an issue and target audience before creating a concept. I have taken the opportunity to look thoroughly into relationships, potential issues, and potential game-based solutions. Even if not always effective, a simple manner of having a general process to address issues and find answers is important. However, I do not particularly think Design Thinking was the perfect or only match for my methodology and this project. Looking back, I believe that Research through Design (RtD) would have given an interesting outcome as well. Complexity and ambiguity are welcomed in this innovative research method, and the study subject could have changed over the course of the project (Gaver, 2012). Knowledge is generated by design interventions, such as future-gazing, prototyping, and navigating complexity and ambiguity. I tried to apply this vision on this project as well, adapting my own version of Design Thinking and
more suitable to the project needs. Even though I do not believe you could conclude Research through Design would have been a better alternative, it may have been one that put more of an emphasis on research and how the project and problem developed and evolved throughout the process. It was now up to me, to adapt the Design Thinking method, and create a stronger foundation to build on for the rest of the project. Therefore, if this kind of academic study were to present itself again, I would definitely consider using the RtD methodology. Additionally, I think that Design Thinking may be successful in a business climate and that it may be best to continue using it there.

**The outcome**

One thing to keep in mind about the LoveTree concept is that you will eventually run out of question cards. The activity and date cards can be repeated without issues. Same as the LoveTree visualisation that can keep expanding on indefinitely. The frequency with which the players desire to move their pawn is determined by the players, and therefore the length of the game for each couple can vary. However, the game’s ultimate purpose is to help you get to know your partner better and deepen your relationship. When all of the available cards have been utilised, the two players are likely to know each other better. Because the game’s goal has been achieved, it is acceptable that the game comes to an end at some point. Additionally, the game’s digital component can still be used. Players can still keep making their LoveTree grow, by participating in activities together and documenting these on the app.

**Future work**

There are a number of aspects that might be essential if this project is
pursued in the future. More play testing is one of them. Because the project was limited in time, there was no way to truly leave the game with a couple for a longer amount of time. Although feedback on the idea, cards, and board has been received, it may be beneficial to play the game for extended periods of time to have a better sense of how the experience is.

Relationships that do not follow a traditional monogamous structure can also be taken into account. Is the game appropriate for people who have numerous partners, and if not, it should be looked into how to improve on this.

What the feedback showed was that adding blank cards is a good idea. In this way, the players can also add activities and questions that suit them well. In this case, once they run through the questions of the game, they can still continue playing if they feel the need to.

**Contribution to Interaction Design**

This project contributes to interaction design by being a game with an unconventional structure that incorporates a digital element. The progress you make in real life is visualised digitally. This is a notion that I believe could be applied in a variety of games, not just this one that aims to strengthen a couple’s relationship. Physical and digital elements have been combined previously, but not in the way Lovetree does.

**Contribution to Relationships & Couples**

The ultimately chosen solution is not a substitute for relationship therapy. It focuses on enhancing the bond between a couple, but is not completely personally altered for a specific couple. It could be used by
couples queuing for relationship therapy, as it can still have a positive effect on the relationship while they wait for professional help. In addition, it can be used by couples who feel they do not fully know each other or do not spend enough time together. Finally, it can of course also be used by couples who like to play a game with each other and need inspiration for new activities and questions to each other.
7. Conclusion

Looking back on the research question; “How could an interactive support tool, using gamedesign, assist couples who are looking to reconnect with each other in their relationship”, this study has shown that a tangible game, or hybrid game, is one of the research question’s probable solutions. It ensures that the couple has face-to-face contact, actively strengthening their bond. While also creating a growing visualisation of the progress they are making and how the relationship is enhancing.

A point of interest surrounding what aspects of a relationship consider people to be good or bad, has been researched through the use of questionnaires. Through literature reviews a look has been taken at prior tools. What kind of features, qualities, type of interactivity the possible design should have, has become clear through the use of brainstorming and a workshop. In the future the prototype could be developed into a fully functional version of the project. While taking into account the feedback collected during the user tests.

To summarise, this project contributes to interaction design mainly because it steps into a relatively new field, namely hybrid games. The combining of physical and digital has been done before, but not precisely in the way Lovetree does. On one hand there are already a plethora of existing relationship tools on the market. However, on the other hand, it has never been done previously to use hybrid games and visualise the progress the way it has been done in LoveTree. There is a growing demand for relationship advice through apps. While singles have been served with dating apps for many years, apps that support people in a relationship are a new and growing category.
Acknowledgements

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Buxton, B. (2010). *Sketching user experiences: getting the design right and the right design*. Morgan kaufmann.


Appendices

1. Survey: Questionnaire

1. How old are you?

2. What gender do you identify as?
3. When was your last serious relationship?

- 2012
- 2017
- 2019
- 10 years
- 1998 to present
- 1y ago
- 2 months ago
- 2 years ago
- 2 years ago
- 2.5 years ago
- 3,5 years ago
- 4 years ago
- 6 years ago
- 7 years ago
- 7 years ago
- A year ago
- At the moment
- Current
- Current
- Current
- Currently
- Currently in a relationship
- Currently in a serious relationship
- Currently in one
- Currently in one.
- Currently in one.
- Ended 2019
- Five year long relationship, ended five years ago.
Half a year ago
I am currently in a happy relationship. On Thursday, it will be our 5th anniversary as a couple.
I’m currently in it. I’ll be 5 years in November
I’m in my first and only one now
I’m in one
I’m currently in one, been together for a year.
I’m in one now
I’m in one right now. We’ve been dating since 2017.
I’m in one ATM.
Last year
never
Now
Now
Now
Now
now
now, never before
October 2021
Ongoing
Present
Right now
Right now
The one I have now
Two years ago
Up until recently
4. What are some positive aspects from your (previous) relationship with your partner? (For example, good communication, joking together.. etc)

Being in love
Commitment, intimacy, got along well with family and friends
Communicating, same values, help each other fix problems, being a safe place for whatever comes, sex
Communication
Communication and sense of always having someone to talk everything about. Good times and memories.
Complicity - friendship - sex
Enjoying physical activities together like cycling, walking, seeing art exhibitions together
Fun times together, many jokes and overall enjoying each others company
Go in walking together
Good communication
Good communication and being close friends
Good communication and caring for eachother's needs, being emotionally available.
Good communication and mutual respect for our quirks and differences
Good communication and sexual relationship
Good communication, had a lot of fun, partner was my best friend, always had things to talk about
Good communication, learning new language and culture (we're from different countries), really enjoying the time together (we're long distance), mutual support
Good communication, similair internets
Good communication, understanding, similar sense of humour,
tolerant.
Great communication, respect for each other’s boundaries and private
time, trust in each other, always comfortable around each other.
Great emotional bond
Great sex, challenging and expanding each other mentally, chaired
opinions
Had good time together
Having fun
Having someone to love in my everyday life, good communication,
honesty, laughing, just existing in the same room without interacting
He is funny, caring, honest, have some of the same interests but also
different and the differences make the relationship interesting.
I don’t have any ex-partner
Internal jokes, trust, good communication skills (even when it comes
to a problem), friendship...
Joking together, communicate well, had same goals, we could do
things together. We liked similar stuff.
Joking together, doing things together also that he was liked by my
parents is an important aspect
Joking together, singing together (toverbal Jordy van loon is our fave
song), bowling together, he is kind and goodlooking for a 50 year old
Guy
Kids
Laughter, giving each other space, compromise, not taking things so
seriously, making time for each other
Love
Loyalty, humor, open communication, taking care of each other,
honesty
Mostly joking. Travling to see each other gave us a chance to really miss each other as well

Nothing.

Pretty good communication, simular humor

Reliability

Safety, communication, kindness

same humor, same kinks, similar looks on life

sharing moments, joking together, shared living costs, future perspective, never alone

Some shared interests (music, gaming etc) good intimacy,

Soulmate

Supporting each other, having fun together, setting financial goals together

Teamwork, on the same page

This is my first relationship. But because previous is in brackets I will take it to mean current as well. Spending time together, laughing, going on trips, hanging out with friends, playing music, cuddling, watching things together.

Travelling together, eating together, relaxing

Trust, good communication, fun together, being able to be together but also separate, easy to hang out with, no need to talk all the time, comfortable with each other, nice to each other.

Trust, respect, support

Understanding

Understanding my mental issues. Not being mad when I cry (I cry a lot and sometimes its unexplainable). Have the same humor and not being controlling/overprotective or jealous

understanding, quality of communication, planning the future

We have good communication, have lots of fun together, I can rely on
him and he's my best friend.

5. What are some negative aspects from your (previous) relationship with your partner? (For example, fighting, bad communication... etc.)
Fighting, different needs and expressions of live
Bad communication, long distance
Not the same interests, some lack of understanding
Mistrust
You get too attached, fighting can affect your daily life, your mood varies, you change as a person.
Fighting, bad communication, passive aggression, ignoring one’s feelings
Not much but mostly bad communication and different lifegoals that’s way to different (Don’t think different life goals is a bad thing)
cheating
Not on the same “level”
Different opinions and wanting different things, fighting
Different personalities and wants that sometimes clash, she doesn’t like to party while I do etc.
No passion and both became interested in other people
Different fundamental views on life and drug abuse (from my point of view)
Boyfriends parents didn’t know about our relationship due to cultural & religious reasons which was difficult for him and me
Long distance, communication on the phone for long periods of time can be difficult
General stress that effect the relationship
We both can be a little messy and lazy.
Raised in very different cultures which led to a few moral arguments, body language differences (e.g., couldn’t tell when the other was
uncomfortable or in a bad mood in social settings) very different tastes and opinions.

Different communication styles

Bad communication, not being on the same “place” in life, lack of common interests

Bad communication, didn’t have the same vision for the future

Bad communication, belittling,

Misunderstandings. But otherwise he’s honestly perfect for me

We are still working out some cultural differences and communication issues because of that but we still talk about what’s going on and try to understand each other.

I don't have any ex-partner but in my relation that i have now it’s the communication that is the problem

Sometimes disagreement on some serious subjects (financial/family)

Age difference. High expectations.

Bad communication, both sides not wanting to give in.

Emotional very unstable, undecisive

Bad communication

Distance

Othing

Jealousy, not respecting boundaries, lying, gaslighting

Bad communication, i felt neglected

Manipulative, fighting, bad communication, cheating, lying and other stuff

Problem with communicating his bad feelings toward me

Different goals in life

Differences in terms of life choices, hence why that relationship ended

bad communication

household chores inequality, not able to have a pet (allergies), jealousy, expectation pressure
Bad communication (he lied a lot and talked to previous girls he's been involved with) Also very manipulative

Nothing

Bad communication, friction on subdivision of chores

He was stubborn and didn’t understand my needs

Again, I will use current relationship. Felling like I can’t be right, feeling bad about myself because of what my partner says, difference in politics.

No honest communication

expectations, non being able to leave the comfort zone of their home, not seeing what the other does for them, not being willing to do the same thing as the other does for them

Complaining about small things

Bad communication

Doesn not share some values in life. Example he hates the police, doesn not want to help them, have anger issues against them while I’m the opposit, whant to help them, doesn’t bother them at all.

different lifestyles, feeling that I am missing out everyday life.

He is a bit messy and sometimes we don’t understand eachother, for example in planning stuff together or organize our home.

6. Have you ever been to couples therapy? If so, could you talk about your experience, was it positive or negative?

3,7 % Yes (Yes didnt work & Yes very negative)

96,3% No
7. Would you use an app together with your partner to strengthen your relationship? Feel free to explain why

Yes. If needed, anything that can help is a plus

Yes, it’s a great and easy way to improve communication

Yes. Relationship takes work and if you can have something to aid that it is good

No

Nope

If there is any geographical distance in the relationship for sure

No - not sure I trust AI to sort out relationships as they are biased

No, mostly because I don’t really have much knowledge or creative thought about how an app is suppose to strengthen the relationship.

Yes I do! because it is useful in distance relationship

Yeah sure

Maybe, if it is something that we would feel would be helpful

sure, if it’s fun!

Sure. If it means a better, healthier and more enjoyable relationship

Sure, if it helps. Wouldn’t want to rely on an app though, just for some tips or get the healing process started.

Yes, seems fun and useful

Yes, it could be a good way to get to know each other in aspects that we don’t usually explore

Yes, a relationship could always improve and it’s important to be able to grow in a relationship

Sure. Gaming and working together to achieve goals is a proven method for team and relationship building.

Yes, my current partner and I always make sure that our communication is a priority but on certain live aspects it can be hard to see eye to eye with someone who was brought up in a very different situation than yourself.
If it was set up as a game I probably would.
Yes, not sure what it would look like thou
Yes! It would enable us to have a better bond!
Sure
Possibly, if there were communication exercises or fun questions to ask your partner to get to know them.
Yes. It’s always nice to find different ways to make our relationship stronger
Yes
I would like to try. He is not so open minded as me, so I believe he wouldn’t be interested. But I would always like to try new thing.
Maybe we could learn something more about each other.
Maybe, it depends what kind of benefit the app would give us.
Yes because Im generally a structured person and enjoy having an app to organize my daily life even if its relationships. However i dont think my partner would do the same.
Yes because my boy is emotional unstable, And an app could help us
No
Maybe? Only if they wanted to.
No
Could be fun to get to know each other better like this catalogue of questions for the first date
We use snapmap, this so when we are out and about we feel safe.
We turned it on one day when I worked late and felt a bite frighten walking home alone
Sure, would be willing to try.
Yes!
No, she isn’t very technical
Maybe, bot sure what it could be but why not
yes, cus it seems like fun.
if it helps, yes why not
It really depends on the app as well as the relationship.
If we are married, yes
Maybe
Probably not, would probably go to in person therapy instead. Apps seem too superficial, take all your data - and this would be very private data.
Maybe
It is hard to come up with ideas every time to spice up the relationship specially when we are together for longer, so i would definetly use an app that recommends me dats or activities to do together
Maybe
Maybe
Maybe
Depends on What the app would be Good for. What aspects of life?
games and discord already do that
Hmm maybe, could be fun!
no, I think that everything a app can give I can say and bring upp with a partner myself. And I think every relationshop with a human being is unique and a app can not possible know what your relationship look like,

8. If you were to use an app with your partner, what kind of functions would you expect? (Think of, setting goals, playing games, question cards... whatever you can think of...)
Easy to use, forces us to think and discuss, fun
Thoughtful question cards, maybe games you play together instead of against each other. Maybe also a function for when you are long distance (incorporating (video)call etc).
Games, questions, important things to talk about, tips or advice
Games and question cards

Playing games

Agenda - games 1v1 - quizz - online courses to follow together - bucket list - video calls - sex games - media storage (organized in timeline for memories?)

n/a

probably something interactive for realworld use like doing things outside etc.

setting goals

Setting goals att commit to that

Games would be fun

Something that creates fun friction between us, complicated questions or games that explore things that we don’t normally know or explore about eachother

Games but with an ulterior motive to communicate and gain more understanding of each other

Question cards, daily missions and tips. Also stuff like recommendations for stuff to do together in the area based on your GPS location

Games and questions

Games, share experiences, beliefs

Question goals, games

To-do list, puzzle games, meal recipes.

Probably something to make hard conversations easier to have. Like a game. Where you can have a softer type of vibe while discussing difficult topics. Or maybe even a function that suggests an activity to do and focus on while communicating hard feelings. That way you don’t have to sit down and raise the tension while trying to explain how you feel.

Questions, games
I am a big fan of games, so something that you could entertain one and other with, whether your together or apart, sounds good if the app would allow us to do challenges, pick a random activity to do together.

Setting target’s together and playing our way into a common understanding.

Fun questions to get to know them, exercises for communication, ideas for activities.

I’m not sure. But maybe some question cards, maybe quizzes.

Playing games.

Maybe something like, truth or dare (some personal questions that partner should/could know) or maybe something like never have I ever (I think that would be fun), maybe even some games similar to board games but with goals like if we set a certain score we should go on trip somewhere together or do a picnic or something like that.

Setting goals, planning future together, promises to keep, trips to make.

Question cards and new activities for us to do. Maybe short time and long time goals as well. Also I think its important to know when one should stop. For example an app could tell me that I shouldn’t shout during conflicts but instead try to explain my feelings better. Instead of getting frustrated, I should discuss more what we can do together towards me not being as frustrated as I am. In this case the long term goal is better well being.

Question cards would be cool.

Problem solving, teamwork games.

No.

Questions about values and shared interests, playing games that help to build trust in each other.

I wouldn’t download a specific app to use with my partner.
Think of, goals
Question card would be good, subjects to talk about that don’t come up neutrally
If I had to think about strengthening a relationship it would have to be something that makes you think about the time spent together, so maybe question cards playing games and like a question game suggestions for what can be done together that both of us will like.. I guess
Some kind of game would be fun.
Something fun that would strengthen our bond
No idea
Fun games
Sex games actually…
Questions cards, playing games, dates, dares, activities to do together Something that mixes fun and serious. The serious could be attitude towards certain things
Idk
Games where you would go out and "do this on a date” to have more fun together life news, gossip, work news, creative challenges, games news, games invitations, Setting goals would be nice… would be nice if we could share stuff as well on the app like a set up a goal and he sees it on his phone.
2. Questions semi-structured interview with a relationship therapist

- As a relationship therapist, what precisely do you do? Do you see the couples together or do you have separate appointments for them?
- Why do couples seek therapy from you? Is there something wrong with their relationship?
- What kind of people use your services? Are they generally people who have been together for a long time, or is it also younger couples?
- When do you consider relationship therapy to have been effective? Is this relative to the quantity of couples that remain together, or are you looking at anything else?
- What is the biggest misconception about relationship therapy?
3. Design of the game board & cards
What specific behaviors and actions from me feel most loving to you?

What makes you feel more loving toward me?

How can I ask for more love from you?

What acts of kindness from me mean the most to you?

Do you see me as a kind person to you and others?

How have I unknowingly been less than kind to you?

What should I do if I need you to talk more to me?

What do you think I don’t feel like talking?

How can I let you know I don’t feel like talking?
Do you feel completely free to talk with me about anything?

What topics do you most enjoy discussing with me?

Am I responsive enough to your emotional needs?

Do you feel free to express your emotions with me?

What should I never say to you in anger or playfulness?

How should we handle it, if a boundary has been crossed?

How could we improve our sex life?

How can I make you feel more desirable and sexy?
What activities and interests can we develop that will bring us closer?

When do you feel the most connected to me?

What kind of memories do we want to create together?

What do you think makes our relationship special?

Do I have any personal habits that get on your nerves? If so, what are they?

What positive habits could we work on together?

Do you have any bad habits you feel you must hide from me?

What makes you uncomfortable?

Are you comfortable with self-care? If not, my hygiene and my health are important to me.
Write each other a handwritten letter

Cook a meal together

Try bodypainting

Work out together

Play a boardgame or cardgame together

Complete a puzzle together

Create a short story together

Switch reading out loud together

Read a book
Create a photo album together

Make a partner bucket list together

Brainstorm on your future together

Learn something new together

Choose outfits for each other

Show each other songs that you recently discovered

Create a music playlist together

Listen to a podcast together

favourite songs
Have a karaoke night together

Watch your favourite movies together

Hold a fashion show for each other

Give each other massages

Do a photoshoot together

Paint / draw each other

Write a haiku for each other

Play Truth or Dare together
Go to a concert together

Go bowling together

Go to your favourite restaurant together

Go visit a museum together

Prepare and go on a picnic together

Go for a hike together in a natural area

Go visit a flee market or thriftstore together

Go mini golfing together
Go to a park together

Go see a movie together

Go eat together at a restaurant you have never eaten at before

Go visit the aquarium together

Go to the swimming pool together

Go take a class together

Go watch the sunset or sunrise together
Go recreate the first date you have been on together.

Go play any sport you would like together.

Go see a play or a musical together.

Go to an escape room together.

Write each other a handwritten letter.

Write each other a handwritten letter.
4. Playtesting

Diary questions

Daily question:

Day _

- What card did you pull today?
- Did you complete the card?
- How was the experience?

Questions after completing the playtesting session:

- Were there any rules that were confusing?
- Did you appreciate the game’s theme? Why or why not?
- Did you appreciate the visual design of the game? Why or why not?
- What did you like most about the game?
- What did you not like about this game?

Space for comments / feedback