



Northumbria  
University  
NEWCASTLE

# Pears Project

Fighting loneliness in  
post-graduate students

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# Part of

**LIDA** Loneliness  
in the Digital Age



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# The problem

- Student mental health is a big issue
  - PGR students have particular issues, including social isolation



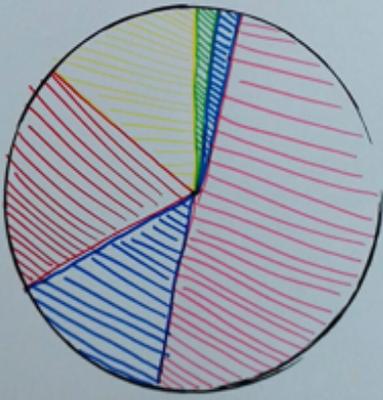
# What we did: the Pears journal



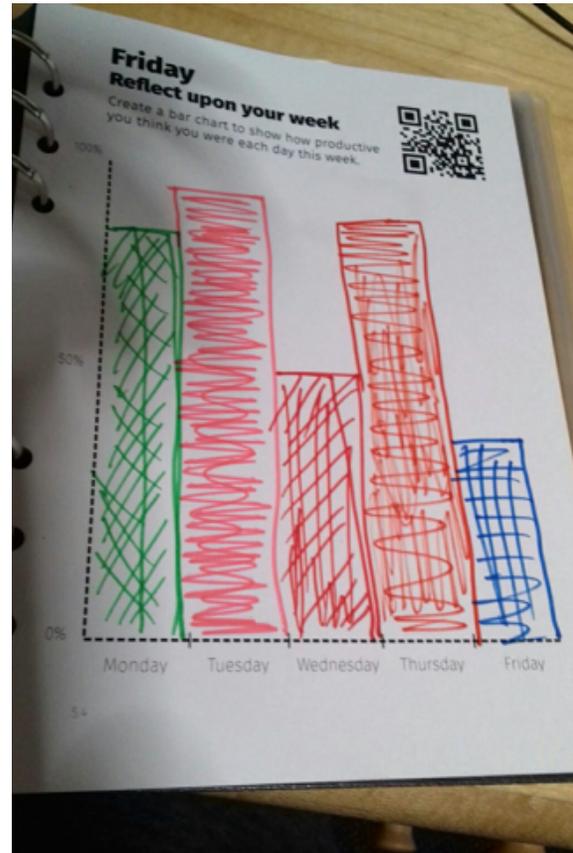
# What we did: the Pears journal exercises

**Tuesday**  
**Progress so far ...**

Create a pie chart by colouring in the circle below to show how much of your thesis you feel is:

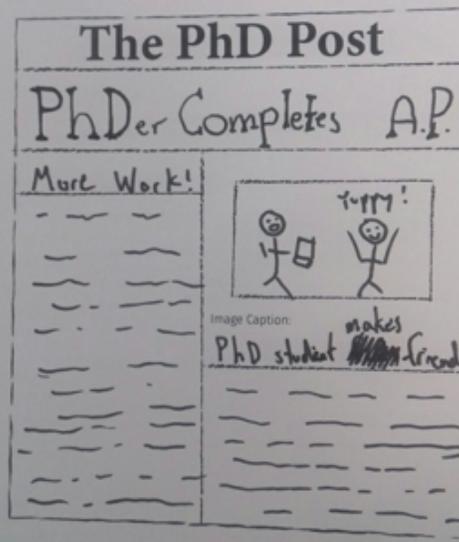


- Complete
- Nearly complete
- Needs drafting
- Needs further research
- Unknown!
- Data Collection



**Tuesday**  
**What's the Scoop?**

Use the template to create a newspaper based on today's story of your PhD. This can be a reflection of what you have done so far, a high point in your academic life, the specifics of the day, or what you are hoping to do, or the ups and downs of the day.



**The PhD Post**

PhDer Completes A.P!

More Work!

Image Caption: makes PhD student friends

**Thursday**  
**Top 10**

Listening to music can help with focus and relaxation. It can make us feel energised, excited, hardworking, or pumped up.

Create a research play list suitable for all of your concentration and work needs.



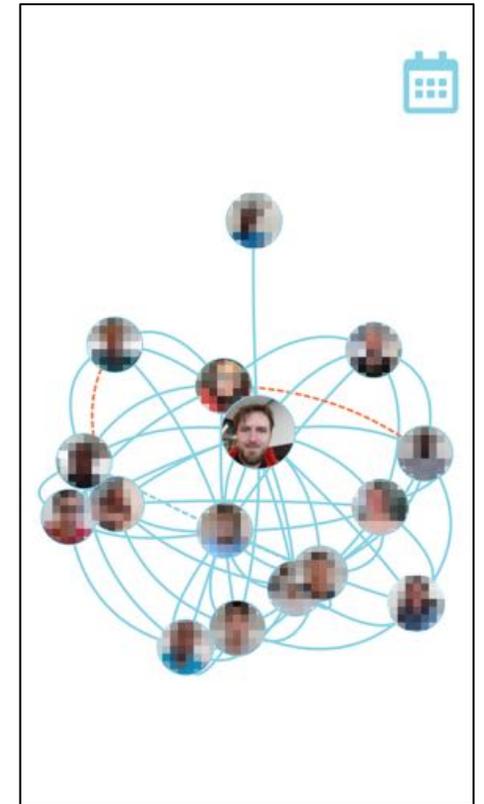
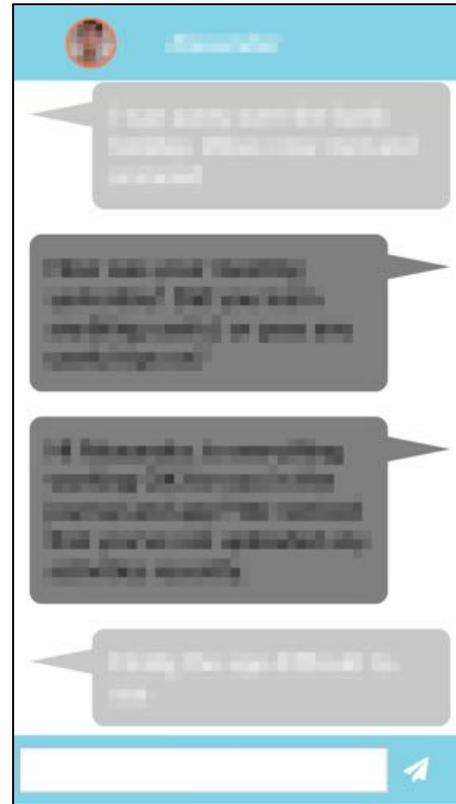
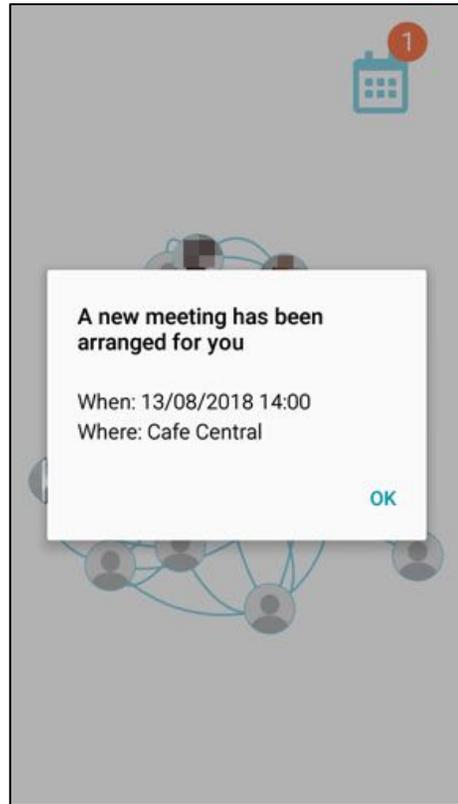
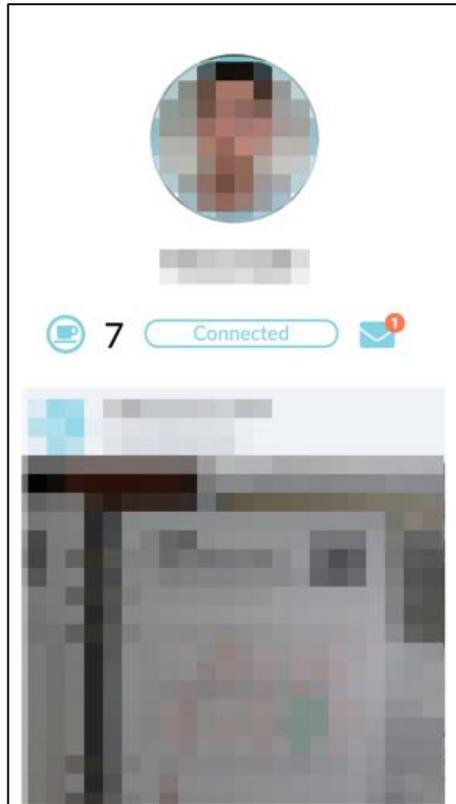
Researcher Play List

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

# What we did: the Pears journal



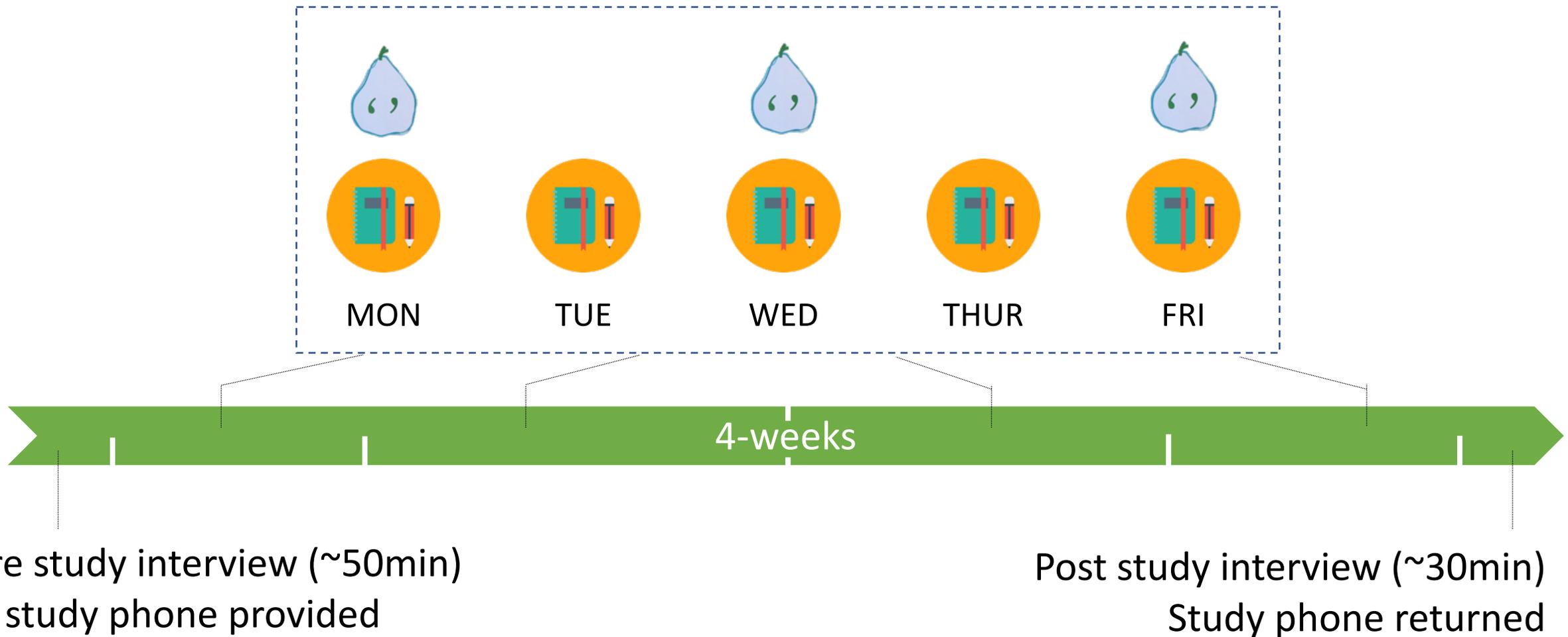
# What we did: the Pears app



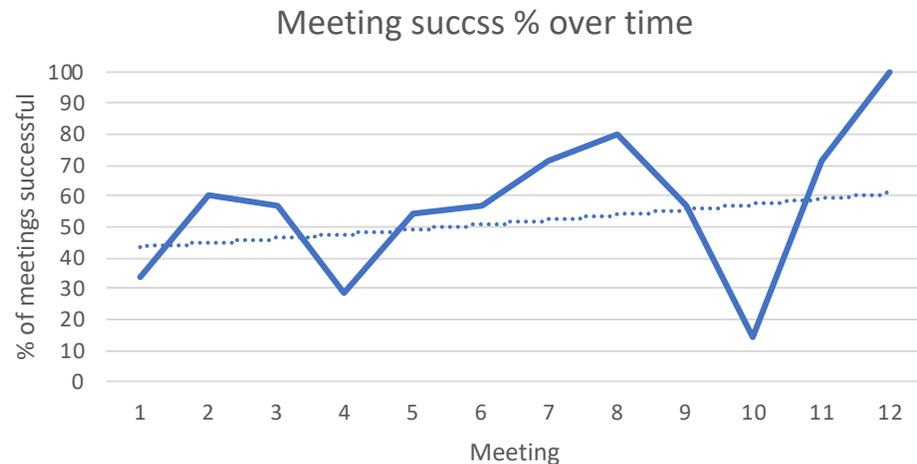
# What we did: the study

N=15

-  "Pearing" (meet up)
-  Diary activities



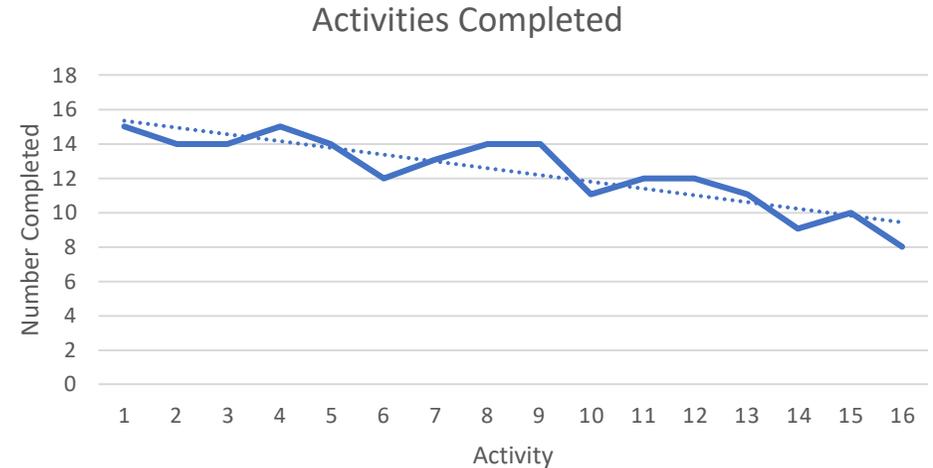
# General Findings



**44/78 (56%) Meetings.**

*“I like the idea of it, and I liked meeting people that I hadn’t met before, and just liked talking to them, as well”.*

*“[the PhD is] what we do all the time. It’s all what we’re thinking about. You don’t want to talk about that”*



**198/240 (82.5%) Activities.**

*“I did kind of fill them in, but it was more a case of because I had to, rather than because I thought I was personally getting anything out of it”*

*“I have continued journaling through an app, but more to track moods and activities – not specific to the PhD as I couldn’t find anything like the Pears Journal”*

# What we found: two use cases





*"I don't really know anyone [...] basically I am on my own"*

*"you don't want to appear to be needy either do you?"*

**BEFORE**

*"we will learn together"*

*"it gives me an idea of how to organise your research life"*

*"It's another perspective"*

**AFTER**

# F.R.I.E.N.D.S

BEFORE

*“it kinda feels like a factory floor [in the hotdesking room] a bit and I didn't really... I didn't really make any friends”*

*“I wasn't really that interested because, you know, I don't want to talk about my PhD; because if they talk about theirs, I have to talk about mine”*

*“I rather thought there might have been some kind of continuing connections coming out of these meetings [...] but that's not the way friendships work really, is it?”*

AFTER

# What we found: potentially harmful?

- Formal “networking-like” meetings.
- People not being honest or “opening up”.
- Students being unsupportive.



*“I was just going through a very rough patch on my own [...] I was actually excited to meet more people but I think it turned out to be the other way. It just became more of an added anxiety”*

# What we learnt

- Studying for a PhD is challenging!
- Students can feel isolated, both socially and from their colleagues.
- Systems such as Pears might be useful.
  - However, peer support and social connectedness can be incongruous
- Peer support does not replace other sources of student support.

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