



No one flees without a reason

In 2019, 79.5 million people fled worldwide. Thus, the number of refugees is almost as large as the German population. 40% of those seeking protection are under 18 years old and some of them are fleeing unaccompanied. Most refugees have to leave their homes due to persecution, conflicts or severe human rights violations.

Arriving refugees feel not only the miles of distance to their homes and families they had to leave behind in their home country, but also the distance to the population living here. For many of us, it is hard to imagine leaving our entire livelihood and family in our homeland and building a new life in another country.

2,785 kilometers

28-year-old Sultana has traveled 2,785 kilometers. Due to the Middle East conflict, she left her hometown Daraa, Syria in 2013. The majority of the people living there struggle with the everyday fear of oppression, torture, abduction and killings. Together with her family, the flight began with a two-year stay in Jordan, where her daughter was born. As they could no longer stay in Jordan, they continued their flight towards Turkey and from there to Greece. It took them a week to find someone to smuggle Sultana and her family to Greece. She didn't remember that boat ride fondly. "We were on a crowded boat and I had my then four-month-old daughter in my arms" Sultana recounts, pausing at first. "I was scared, but I also knew I had no other choice." They spent another 2 weeks with other refugees on a Greek island until they were allowed to continue to Athens. From there, they took different means of transportation such as bus, train, and in parts were also forced to cross the countries of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, and Austria on foot. Their flight stretched over several years until they arrived in Germany in 2016. She remembers her first moments in Germany clearly. "The joy I felt at that moment cannot be put into words," she describes.

The language barrier and the negative attitude of the locals / German citizens towards refugees made Soultana's initial time in Germany difficult. Nevertheless, she made an effort to communicate openly with her fellow Germans and built a good relationship with her neighborhood. "It is important to treat all people with respect," she said. "I am happy to live here. I don't have to be afraid to go out anymore," Soultana reports today. She has lived in Ulm with her family since 2016. Soultana learned the German language and became a mother again. Her husband, with whom she fled Syria, now works as an automotive mechatronics technician.

4,180 kilometers

4,180 kilometers separate Sharif from his hometown Omdurman, Sudan and his current place of residence Ulm. In 2011, he dropped out of his studies there and set out on his own. He had a long journey with many stops through Chad, Libya and Tunisia before he finally made it to Germany. "I wished for better education and living conditions," Sharif tells us. He clearly remembers his arrival in Germany in 2013, when they were welcomed by the mayor in Hanover. "I was relieved, I had finally reached my goal after two years," says the now 32-year-old. He, too, was unable to re-enter Sudan after fleeing to Germany. "I miss my family the most, I haven't seen them for nine years," Sharif says, mentioning that he hopes to visit them soon.

Since Germans are also said to be prejudiced, he fears they will be able to integrate properly into society, but says he himself has never experienced any xenophobic confrontations. However, he also says that he makes a special effort to adapt to the culture. In his early days in Stuttgart, he immediately learned German. He was able to make many new friends through his workplace and acquaintances from the music academy. To begin his education, he left Stuttgart and moved to Ulm. Sharif successfully completed his training as a medical-technical radiology assistant and is currently working at the University Hospital in Ulm. "I wanted better education and I got it here, I am happy about that." said Sharif.

4,182 kilometers

Yassin has covered 4,182 kilometers. He was 18 years old when he fled alone in 2013. Like Sharif, he also fled to Germany via the countries of Libya and Tunisia. He arrived in Hanover, where he spent two weeks before moving to Stuttgart, where he still lives today. Like the other two fugitives, his odyssey also lasted several years. The civil war and the bad economic situation were the reasons for his flight. Like Sharif, he has not seen his family since he fled and hopes to visit them soon. "There is nothing I miss more." Says Yassin.

On his initial feelings, Yassin says, "At first it was strange, strange looks, strange language, just everything was strange." But over time, he got used to the new life. In his free time, Yassin does a lot of endurance sports. He runs marathons in the club and was thus able to make many contacts quickly. In general, he was able to make many new acquaintances through school and through his work. The now 26-year-old feels at home in Stuttgart. After Yassin arrived in Stuttgart, he attended a language course, so he was able to catch up on his secondary school diploma and successfully complete an apprenticeship as a machine and plant operator. Next year he plans to continue his education. With the words "I am happy about the opportunities I have received here," Yassin ended our conversation.

Three different and yet so similar fates. Three out of many millions.



New Realities - Road to Reality

Many people only know them from videos, see the glasses hanging in department stores from time to time, and yet have never tried them out. Yet the use of virtual reality (VR) offers decisive advantages, especially in companies. Where people reach the limits of their imagination, VR technology can help. Complex topics and projects can be made tangible and understandable even before they are completed.

More and more companies are using VR to present prototypes, to simulate walk-throughs of buildings that have not yet been constructed, or to hold meetings or training sessions. Since the 1990s, the technology has been developing steadily and is proving to be an efficient approach in more and more companies. Virtual reality is increasingly transforming itself from a niche trend to a tool that delivers sustainable added value, especially to large corporations.

The possibilities of VR seem endless: Besides interactive avatars, any projection of objects and spaces in 3D is possible. Audiovisual content, i.e. both visible and audible elements of any kind, can be realistically displayed with the help of VR glasses. Thanks to motion sensors and cameras that analyze every movement, users find themselves in an interactive, virtual world.

Of course, you are not physically in the world that is presented to you, but distances can still be bridged in this way:

Virtual reality is particularly helpful for projects that have not yet been completed. For example, prototypes of new car models can help the employees involved to develop an understanding of the process through the virtual representation. In addition, the perceived proximity to the finished project may also increase acceptance of it. Also, especially in times when people are

asked to keep their distance, virtual reality offers a suitable means to give others a feeling of closeness to the project but also to other people and colleagues through those audiovisual contents. Through interviews with Claudia Kiani, co-founder of the VR agency Omnia360 and Jan Fiedler, technology specialist at HNU, we gained insights into a world that pushes the boundaries of the imaginable.

Opportunities

In addition to illustrating complex projects, virtual reality also offers a high entertainment factor, according to Kiani. Accordingly, she also uses the glasses for collaboration with colleagues and customers. Immersion (being immersed in the virtual world) can eliminate disruptive factors, which is why participants are fully present in VR. Motivated by the opportunity for interaction, VR sessions achieve results quickly and aggressively increase participant engagement. In addition to employee acceptance and understanding, VR presentations also mobilize investors.

Kiani sees further benefits in the industrial sector in particular: Virtual training, for example in the healthcare sector, and prototype modeling in 3D can save costs by eliminating preparation time. In a relatively short time, for example, planned products can be presented in preliminary versions without high budget and material costs. This is why virtual reality is particularly suitable for industries with explanation-intensive processes.

Barriers

Even though VR already offers an enticing number of opportunities, problems still arise now and then. Kiani refers first to motion sickness, the feeling of dizziness or nausea that users experience when they wear VR glasses for too long. After about 30 minutes, the human brain can no longer process the impressions, which is why users still often complain about discomfort. Kiani has also already told us the solution approach: "The whole thing can be fixed by reducing latency, i.e. when the image moves along without delay when you turn your head and images don't have to reload." She also speaks of a still very high need for education, as there is often still fear of contact and prejudice against VR, especially with regard to the representation of people. The research associate for virtual and augmented reality at Neu-Ulm University, Jan Fiedler, calls the depiction of people the "royal class" of VR. Currently, the representation of people in VR is reminiscent of animated drawings.

However, the biggest obstacle currently preventing companies from using VR is likely to be the software required for it. While the purchase of VR glasses is comparatively inexpensive, the implementation of custom software remains associated with an enormous effort – both in terms of time and money.

Perspectives

After talking about opportunities and risks, we naturally wanted another future outlook from Claudia Kiani regarding VR in enterprises. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the need and interest in VR is growing immensely, driving research and innovation in the glasses. In addition, the glasses are becoming increasingly self-sufficient, which means that the glasses can be used without being connected to a computer, making them significantly easier and less complicated to use.

Although implementing virtual reality is an investment, the added value offered by the use of virtual reality outweighs this, especially in large companies. Virtual reality allows even complex issues to be presented in a way that can be experienced and increases acceptance. Especially when proportions and audiovisual content play a role, the use of VR increases efficiency. Despite existing problems, the technical nature is improved with each generation of VR glasses and reaches more and more users. Problems such as motion sickness will also be fixed, making them much easier to use. Thus, there is increasingly less standing in the way of a more widespread distribution and accessibility of VR technology. Accordingly, our contacts predict that the boundaries of the imaginable in particular will continue to blur.



The Way of St. James - in 42 days from Seville to Santiago

For many centuries, the Way of St. James has attracted thousands of pilgrims year after year towards Santiago de Compostela in Spain. The place is considered sacred because the tomb of the Apostle James is said to be found here.

History of the Way of St. James

The Way of St. James was first mentioned in the eighth century, at which time the stories of St. James spread. He was a missionary in northern Spain and is said to have found his last resting place there. People began to visit the tomb of James and made pilgrimages from all over Europe to that special place. Since time immemorial, the Way of St. James has been one of the most popular pilgrimage routes in the world. Year after year, thousands of people walk the Camino for a variety of reasons. At that time purely religiously motivated, today it is often about forgetting everyday life, to find oneself or to overcome grief.

Camino – Spanish word for path, used by most pilgrims as a synonym for the Way of St. James.

An experience report

Among the many, many people who are drawn to the Camino year after year was Florian. He started his great journey to Santiago de Compostela in Seville in the spring of 2019.

Why did you decide to walk the Camino de Santiago, were you searching for yourself?

A bit of self-discovery was definitely involved. I always wanted to walk the Camino de Santiago and take on this challenge. Before that, I had already been abroad alone a few times, but that wasn't enough for me. When I then had a few months off in spring 2019, I saw this as my chance to finally make my dream come true.

How did you prepare for the trip?

The whole thing was relatively spontaneous. I only started planning two months beforehand. Good equipment is the be-all and end-all. This can also cost a little more, especially shoes are super important. In retrospect, I would also recommend taking baby powder and earplugs and learning a little Spanish.

Which route did you choose?

The route is called Via de la Plata and is one of the longest routes with over 1000 kilometers. I started in Seville, but actually the route starts about 300 kilometers further south directly on the coast. The route is relatively quiet, I saw maybe only 2-3 people for days.

How were the first days on the Way of St. James?

It was especially physically demanding at the beginning. When I started I had about 11 kilograms of luggage, plus water so sometimes then almost 15 kilograms on my back, which was much too much. I then first sent a large package home. The loneliness and the associated responsibility for yourself were also challenging at the beginning. For example, if you get injured or something happens, you can be in the middle of nowhere, with no help far and wide.

How many kilometers did you walk each day?

I was on the road for a total of 43 days. The number of kilometers per day varied greatly, there were days when I only managed five kilometers, but that was due to an injury, on another day I ran 47 kilometers. On average, I would say that about 25 kilometers per day is quite doable.

Have you always stayed in youth hostels, in your own tent or in a hotel?

I actually planned to go camping and bought everything I needed for it. When I went camping for the first time after three days, it was hell. It was extremely cold and damp. At the end of April the nights in Spain are very cold. I then decided to give up camping and gave away my equipment at the nearest hostel.

The hostels are mostly private institutions of locals or monasteries, which are financed by donations from hikers. In good hostels you get a comfortable bed and a delicious dinner. Sleeping is mostly in dormitories. The largest dorm I've been in was in a hostel with about 90 beds in one room, which was intense. The great thing about hostels is also that you get to meet a lot of people. One night I sat at the dinner table with 30 different nations.

What did a classic day on the Way of St. James look like for you?

I usually got up at six o'clock, went shopping the day before so that I had something for breakfast and at seven I usually left. Mostly I got up at six o'clock and prepared myself for the day. Around seven o'clock I started running. I never had a concrete schedule, but took breaks when the landscape was particularly beautiful or the heat became unbearable. At the end of each day, I rested at the hostel and then explored the town.

Did you have any physical discomfort due to running?

Many, many blisters! As soon as you have one, you don't walk properly and then there are more and more. At peak times I had nine on one foot. At some point I couldn't even wear my walking shoes anymore because it hurt so much. Remedy create, as long as the blisters are still small,

blister plasters. As soon as they are larger helps baby powder, I have always given me in the socks then the friction is not so strong.

You really have to take good care of yourself and not overestimate yourself, especially in the beginning. I totally overdid it on one day and then my Achilles tendon was inflamed, the following days I could only run short stages and the whole thing was really painful.

Did you walk the whole route or did you take the bus?

I always walked, but there is the possibility to leave your backpack. It is then driven to the next hostel. Especially on the Camino de Frances the infrastructure is really good, there is an extra backpack service.

What was your most beautiful experience on the course?

The most beautiful days were actually those on which I ran through beautiful landscapes. But I remember one day particularly well. It was in the middle of spring and everything around me was in bloom, just gorgeous. I ran through a nature park saw many animals and could enjoy the great landscape from a vantage point.

What was your worst experience on the route?

One evening I sat with other pilgrims and drank a glass of wine more than necessary. The next day I felt bad, but I just went anyway. After a few kilometers I noticed that I had not filled up my water bag. To make matters worse, I also got lost, an absolute disaster. I felt worse and worse from hour to hour. Fortunately, I eventually arrived in a small village, by this time I was already completely dehydrated. Unfortunately, there was no store or fountain there, but I felt so bad that I just knocked on the doors and asked for water. The locals were very nice and still apologized for the chlorinated water – honestly, that was the best water I ever drank. When I arrived at the hostel that day, I walked a total of 47 kilometers. All in all, that was a real borderline experience.

Has the long-distance hike changed you?

Above all, I learned that I can always achieve my goals, no matter how hard the road ahead is. Because on the Way of St. James I always had to keep walking, no matter how bad I felt.

What was the feeling like arriving in Santiago?

It was actually a bit sad. I was used to running and could have calmly run a few days longer. But on the other hand, it was also a great feeling to finally arrive at my destination. The Way of St. James ends on a large square in front of the church. There I sat down for a few hours and thought about the past 42 days.

Would you do a long-distance hike again?

Definitely. But it's also an expensive thing to do; I spent a total of 2,000 euros. You can count on about 25 euros per day.

What would you recommend to people who plan to walk the Camino de Santiago?

The most important thing is definitely time. If you want to walk the Way of St. James, you should take this time. If there is no other way, it is better to choose a shorter route or walk in stages,

so that you can enjoy the beauty and everything else. It is simply important not to rush and to remain flexible. If you like it particularly well in a place, also the possibility to stay sometimes a day longer. I would recommend about six weeks time, so you have no stress.



Covered Distance - the path of our everyday objects

"Good afternoon, we would like to inform you that we have shipped your order. Your shipment is now on its way," reads Jan and closes the mail. He can hardly wait to hold his order in his hands. He has been waiting for it for over a week now. "What's taking so long?" he wonders.

The doorbell rings, and in front of him is Annika, a fellow student. "You're late. We were supposed to start on time at 10," Jan greets Annika. "Hello Jan. I know, sorry. There was a detour on my route and I didn't expect the extra kilometers when I left earlier." "Alright. Maybe my order has to take detours too. It still hasn't arrived," Jan says. "How fast do you think a delivery like that goes? What distance such a small package has to travel? You could have just bought it here in town, that would certainly have been faster," Annika says. Without saying anything else, Jan goes to his desk and the two begin their project work.

After Annika has said goodbye in the afternoon, Jan takes another look in the mailbox. Sure enough, his order has finally arrived. The package comes from Leipzig. "Actually not that far away," he reflects. He sits down on his sofa, unpacks the book he ordered and begins to read the first lines. However, they don't really stick. He can't help wondering what kind of distance this book has really covered. He pulls out his smartphone and looks up the distance between Ulm and Leipzig. Around 460 kilometers. On the cover of the book, he reads that it was produced in a print shop in Leck, Schleswig-Holstein. From there to Leipzig is another 580 kilometers. "Wow," Jan thinks to himself.

He looks at his iPhone in amazement. "I wonder what kind of journey my cell phone has made?" He bought it at an electronics store in his town. But it won't have traveled just those few miles; it must have gotten there, too. After a brief investigation, Jan finds out that his iPhone was designed in the USA, in Silicon Valley in California. Components for the inside of the smartphone, such as iron, copper, nickel, gold and tantalum, come from the Congo. These raw materials are then shipped from Africa to China. Apple has its devices assembled there before they are shipped to Germany, in Jan's case. That's over 20,000 kilometers: from the individual raw materials to the factory and finally to the point of sale.

Jan first makes himself a cup of coffee in response to these startling findings. The project work as well as his little research was quite tiring. While Jan waits for the coffee to go through, he wonders what kind of distance coffee actually covers. He turns the coffee package over and reads that the "Arabica beans" it contains come from Kenya. The beans are shipped to Europe by ship and end up in the port of Hamburg, from where they are further transported by truck to the supermarkets. By ship from Mombasa, Kenya, to Hamburg, Germany, it's about 3,700 nautical miles, or about 7,000 kilometers. From Hamburg to Ulm it is another 700 kilometers. In total, almost 8,000 kilometers, which are covered here so that Jan continues to have enough energy.

With the full coffee cup, Jan sits down on his bed. While he drinks it, he can't help but keep thinking. Annika has driven several kilometers to see him today so that they can work together. Both the components of his smartphone and his coffee have traveled more distance than he can imagine. "Does everything I own come from so far away?" His bed and dresser are from IKEA. "Surely it all comes from Sweden". Again, he reaches for his smartphone to do some research. IKEA's furniture pieces are designed in Älmhult, Sweden. The wood for the furniture pieces comes from Europe or occasionally from Asia. Other components such as screws come from East Asia or Europe. The pieces of furniture are processed at several production sites in Germany as well as in Eastern Europe. By the time the furniture reaches him, it can have traveled up to 9,000 kilometers.

It's 7 p.m. and Jan begins to prepare his dinner. He reaches for the pasta package and the fresh vegetables he had bought at the weekly market the day before. Pasta is made primarily from durum wheat semolina, with China, India and the United States being the main producing countries. Jan's pasta is made in Italy. Thus, the finished pasta has traveled up to 9,000 kilometers. He bought his vegetables for the sauce at the weekly market from regional farmers who come from within a 40-kilometer radius.

He runs all his thoughts and the information he found out through his head again. Many items travel long distances. He finds it quite startling that the vegetables from the weekly market are the only ones that didn't have to be transported halfway around the world. "But it can't really be avoided either. Is it possible, then, to only have items that travel shorter distances?" Now Jan is even more pleased that he had decided to buy regional vegetables yesterday.

Most items are made of several materials, such as wood, metal, plastic and glass. Certain ores are also found only sporadically on earth, so the journey of a smartphone is longer than that of potatoes grown and sold by the farmer in the neighboring village. Nevertheless, it is everyone's own decision to try to buy regionally-available items locally as well.

Buying behavior has changed significantly in recent years. Thanks to attractive online offers and short-term shipping, shopping on the Internet has long since become the norm. As easy and convenient as shopping directly from the couch may be, equally good deals for electronics, clothes and much more can be found locally in stores. This avoids unnecessarily long transport routes and not only supports the retail trade, but also protects the environment at the same time through the low emission of CO₂. Nevertheless, you should always consider first whether you really need the desired items. Because sometimes it takes less to see more.



When distant closeness is addictive

We are sitting in a small restaurant, it is already dark, the candle on the table illuminates our faces with a warm glimmer of light. I take the hand of my counterpart, am happy about the cozy togetherness that develops between us despite the other guests.

PING! Unpleasantly, almost blindingly, the screen of my smartphone, which lies next to our entwined hands, lights up. I withdraw my hand, reach for the device, and there are no longer two of us alone. There's Peter sharing a funny video, Marianna who just liked my latest Instagram post, and Loreley texting me that she really needs to call me. My attention is on the screen, not the eyes of my counterpart. My mind wanders to the posts and messages instead of the conversation with my counterpart.

RINGRING! I push the call away from Loreley, send a laughing smiley face to Peter, and put my phone back on the table with an apologetic smile. I want to grab my counterpart's hand, but it's no longer there. Our faces shimmer again in warm candlelight, but the warmth between us is no longer palpable. "I have to go, take care ...," he says, stands up and leaves. The cell phone with Peter, Marianna and Loreley lies next to me, but I feel lonelier than ever before.

#InspiringQuotation

83 million people live in Germany, 38 million of whom are active social media users. Almost every second person is online every day, and the average person spends more than 2 hours a day on social media. Extrapolated, that's about 5 years and 4 months in a lifetime.

5 years and 4 months (lived) lifetime

Social media is a source of information and inspiration. For every hobby there is a community, for every question there is an answer. We are community animals. On Facebook, Instagram,

YouTube and the like, physical distance no longer plays a role. Communication is possible with anyone, even if their uncle lives on the other side of the world. With one click, you're no longer alone, you can write messages back and forth in seconds, talk on the phone for hours with video, or discover numerous pictures from the lives of others.

HYPER, HYPER - sings Scooter. Do you like it hardcore? We need the hardcore.

One Like stands for attention, several Likes give us the feeling of being seen. Appreciation in the form of likes or comments strengthens our self-esteem, just like light makes plants shoot up. Except we don't bloom more colorfully when we sit at the dinner table or on the sofa in the evening without a filter. 62% of adults confirm that they feel better when they get positive reactions to their content shared online.

Biologically, the release of dopamine in our brain is increased when we use social media. The so-called happiness hormone is produced particularly strongly when social media users state their own thoughts. Selfies, "spontaneous" snapshots, the way to the gym, the freshly prepared super-food breakfast. The fact that happiness is sprayed in this way is not surprising. It becomes a cause for concern when you know that in a conversation between two people in the real world, "only" 30 to 40 % of the content revolves around their own views. In social media communication, on the other hand, 80% of the content is purely self-centered. Almost twice as much dopamine is released compared to a real conversation - no wonder we are so keen to share everything from our lives online.

"But I might miss something ...!"

With the ability to follow every move from one's own life and the lives of others comes the fear of missing out. "Isn't there something better, more appropriate, more awesome out there that you haven't seen, experienced yet?" Social media can boost self-confidence, but at the same time it (also) makes many feel like they're not good enough. On social media, most people portray their lives as better than they are in reality; properly staged, even the dishwasher becomes a millionaire - without even a 7-figure bank balance. Social media makes us compare our lives with those of others. As a result, many people forget to value their own lives. This distancing from one's own life can also become a distancing from one's own body. Here we are no longer talking about high screen time.

Dismorphophobia is a serious psychological disorder. Affected people feel ugly or disfigured, even though they have no beauty flaws whatsoever. Especially in the (social) media, good looks seem to be the ticket to success. The result: the impression is created that beauty alone makes people happy. Approximately 2.4 percent of the population suffers from dismorphophobia, a perception disorder that often begins in adolescence. A conscious and, above all, distanced approach to the ideals of beauty portrayed in (social) media is becoming increasingly important here. As is well known, these ideals are not based on the average BMI.

We are all addicted

The cell phone vibrates in your pocket, you pick it up, the screen lights up, but there's no new message on it. "But it was vibrating!?" Scientists at the University of Michigan Institute call this phenomenon the phantom vibration syndrome. According to their study, this is a sign of addiction, which 89% of respondents felt 1x every two weeks. Professor Dr. Larry Rosen explains that phantom vibrations can reflect compulsive behavior. Cell phones create the opportunity to be in constant contact with other people, to constantly know what those people

are doing. As a result, we look at our cell phones an average of 120 times a day. Our brain creates phantom vibrations because of this 24/7 accessibility, because we expect a message or a call at any time anyway. Cell phones have not only changed the way we communicate. They also manipulate our brain's behavior.

Distant proximity - the measure determines the effect

A life without digital networking is no longer imaginable. Without WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook & Co. we feel isolated, left alone, excluded. Striving for community is not a challenge - it doesn't take much more than a click or a picture. However, when the illusory world becomes reality and not a second passes without the smartphone, social media is no longer inspiring and unifying. Where expectations are high, the disappointment is all the greater when fulfillment fails to materialize. Social media are not social contacts per sé. Social media creates cohesion and exchange, creates closeness despite distance. Social media thrive on the fact that we spend a large part of our (free) time there. And as with everything in life that you spend a lot of time with, it needs breaks in contrast. Social media detox is the answer to reduced addiction potential. Creating awareness about the meaning of "time well spent" and "digital well-being," about the divergence between the analog and digital worlds. Viewed from a distance, things usually become clearer. At a distance, you often learn to appreciate the important things more. At the end of the day, we decide for ourselves how much time we spend on the screen.



Thigh gap - only beautiful with gap?!

The thigh gap is a dangerous ideal of beauty, which is sought especially by young girls and women. Does the distance between the thighs define real beauty?

Trigger warning: this text deals with perception disorders as well as disturbed eating behavior. If you have problems with it, please contact a person you trust or www.anad.de.

THIGH GAP

This trend has been omnipresent for several years now and suggests a completely wrong definition of body attractiveness. Young women, who for various reasons are insecure about their own bodies, are particularly influenced by this trend.

The thigh gap is a clearly visible gap between the legs of upright women with closed feet, which is considered desirable by many young girls who love sports. This is because it is the ultimate proof of being sufficiently thin. At least, that's the thinking of those who pursue this beauty ideal and glorify it on social media. The more impressive the gap, the more encouragement they get from the social media skinny scene.

PROBLEM

Compared to conventional beauty ideals, such as a flat stomach or long hair, the thigh gap is an unattainable body ideal for many women in purely physical terms - tempting them to dangerous and extreme starvation diets. Some women are "lucky" to have been "blessed" with a natural thigh gap through a wide pelvic position. Most, however, pursue this ideal with a completely different anatomical condition that makes it impossible to become the owner of such a gap without an eating disorder. The result: an ever-growing hunger cult in the vortex of an anorexia-glorifying community.

SKINNY CRAZE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

In a short time, the thigh gap has replaced the "ruler on the pelvic bone" method in the skinny scene. Proof photos of young women putting a rod over their pelvic bones always look sick and are celebrated on the net for exactly that. The thigh gap, on the other hand, can be photographed in many attractive situations and is therefore often subtly noticed through photos of Instagram role models such as bloggers, influencers or models. Even fitness bloggers

create workouts for the glorified internet phenomenon. However, if you specifically search for the hashtag #thighgap, you realize how dangerous the trend really is at the latest after the trigger warning that follows. You can find several hundred thousand posts that promote the ideal with captions like "[...] I still can't get over the thigh gap!!! [...] I just can't get enough of this gap!!! It's the same feeling of collar bones and hips!" idealize. For example, the skinny community responds to such posts like this, "Totally get you! I keep touching my collar bone! Keep up the good work!". The web is flooded with these gap photos and motivational comments. The motifs vary from typical selfies, with which the girls want to show themselves as attractive as possible, to pure anatomy photos, in which nothing else can be seen of the body but two pale, sad thighs and a gap in between.

CULT OF THE SKINNY X THIGH GAP IDEAL

The skinny scene on Instagram is broad. It only takes a few clicks to get to profiles that already use words like "thinspo," "skinny" or "thinspiration" in their usernames. Their feed consists largely of photos of alarmingly thin women, which are intended to serve as inspiration and motivation. The smaller part of the uploads includes pictures that show an area of the user's body itself and are described as "too fat" or "ugly" in a completely unrealistic way. Self-deprecation and self-hatred become a regular part of the agenda. Motivational comments to continue fasting form the feedback to this.

The hashtags #ana and #mia in particular signal how big the scene really is: 20 million posts appear under the two tags, which trivialize the diseases anorexia and bulimia. Most of them also address the much idolized thigh gap. Actually, this ideal is caught in a construct of anorexia and disease - more of a warning signal than a desirable goal.

OPPOSITES

In the endless stream of photos of skinny thighs, warnings also stand out. Franzidevil posts, for example, "Fuck this goddamn thigh gap. Fuck seeing bones as a beauty ideal. You can't tell me in my life that starving yourself down like that is healthy." And 2fab4um8 also writes, "If you think protruding collarbones and thigh gap are beautiful, you're just wrong." But mostly you come across the familiar slogans of the anorexia movement, such as "Next time, think about whether you want pizza or nice legs" or - even more extreme - "I love it when people whisper behind me, 'My God, how thin she got.'"

Meanwhile, many influencers are also trying to counter this trend. Signed "For more reality on instagram," they post two photos in which they depict how many thigh gaps are created solely by a clever pose with matching light and how their bodies are actually shaped without strenuous posing.

BODYSHAMING

But young girls only see the perfect photos of perfect models. In forums, teenagers despair because the gap does not want to set despite iron fasting. The advice of the skinny community: even more iron fasting. Do even more sports. Even less life.

And as with every beauty ideal, all those who fail to meet it are punished. Women whose thighs touch are dubbed pitiful creatures whose jeans rub together as they walk. Slim girls who document their journey to the desired thigh gap online are urged to be even more extremely hungry. And women who speak out against the beauty ideal in general are defamed. The most

prominent victim of the "tigh-gap crowd" is model Robyn Lawley. Because of her cover photo on "Vogue Italia" she was called a "fat pig" because her thighs were touching. The plus-size model was defamed on her own Facebook page. Through this incident, the "BodyPositivity" movement got rolling and is spread every day through many channels to counteract the idealization of dangerous diseases and beauty ideals.

BODY POSITIVITY

This movement has many facets: it expresses itself in the form of texts on blogger channels, photos with appropriate descriptions or live videos of influencers, in which they appeal to their followers for a healthy self-image. Whether you have wide hips, strong thighs, cellulite or small breasts, it's just right the way you are - that's the input to the community. More and more people dare to follow this movement and accept and love their body as a whole, instead of hiding for isolated features that may deviate from the classic beauty ideal. Every body is beautiful in its own way. You just have to recognize it and start feeling good in it. And for that you don't need a gap between your thighs. This opinion is shared by many -in the meantime, around 20 million posts on Instagram are tagged with bodypositivity hashtags. Will the skinny craze on social media soon come to an end?

MESSAGE

It sounds controversial to idealize things that are part of a mental illness with the highest mortality rate. Does one want to be sick? Does one want to join individuals who must face death daily because of their anorexia? Illness is certainly not a conscious choice. Following ideals of beauty, which are also strived for by addicted, eating disordered individuals, is. The downward spiral into the depths of anorexia begins insidiously yet steadily. And the entry into disturbed eating behavior not infrequently happens via beauty ideals such as thigh gaps or visible collarbones.

Especially the size-zero fashion world and its models, who are often nothing more than walking clothes hangers, convey false ideals of beauty. The Instagram channel "shitmodelmgmt" clearly shows how badly most models are doing. Shocking insights into an otherwise mysterious and supposedly glamorous world - just a few minutes on the profile "shitmodelmgmt" show the bleak reality of being a model: eating disorders, pressure to perform, loneliness, depression, sexual harassment - the daily companions of a catwalk beauty.

Time to take a step back from size zero. To put an end to the madness. To give quality of life back to the profession of modeling. And to stop implying false and undesirable beauty ideals to young girls and women.

Spread body positivity and a healthy mindset.



Social phobia - when fear distances people

A healthy soul is the basic prerequisite for a fulfilled life. Yet many people struggle daily with mental disorders that severely affect their lives and cause interpersonal distance. One of them is social phobia - it is one of the more unknown mental illnesses.

A sick psyche can affect anyone

Social phobia is the fear of social situations that involve interaction with other people. You could say social phobia is the fear and anxiety of being judged by other people.

Today, social phobia - also called social anxiety disorder - is the third largest mental health problem in the world. The lifetime prevalence rate, which is the likelihood of developing social anxiety disorder at some point during one's lifetime, is just over 13%. Any person could develop it, as many different factors can cause it. Reasons for developing social phobia can include:

- Heredity
- Controlling parenting style
- Unpleasant experiences with others
- Character traits such as shyness
- Increased focus on one's own body
- Negative self-image
- Traumatic experiences

Distorted perception - when prior knowledge is missing

Mental illnesses are viewed too one-sidedly and are often associated with depression or eating disorders. But not every illness can be plausibly justified. People with social phobia are often perceived as quiet, closed, withdrawn or even unfriendly, nervous, distant and disinterested. Due to the lack of awareness about social phobia, misunderstandings arise: Affected people often meet ignorant fellow human beings who cannot empathize with such fears. This can lead to interpersonal conflicts such as communication problems. If an ill person is not taken seriously and understood, this can further aggravate the mental disorder.

Contrary to preconceptions, they, like others, want to make friends, be included in groups, and participate in social interactions. But their illness prevents them from doing these things. Although these people want to be friendly, open, and social, fear holds them back.

Recognizing stressful situations early on

Social phobia sufferers feel extremely overwhelmed and stressed in various situations that are part of everyday routine for mentally healthy people. You could say that they are fighting an inner battle with themselves. Triggers can be ordinary situations, such as meeting new people or returning faulty goods. Feelings of discomfort can also be triggered at work: For example, in a meeting with authority figures or giving a speech at public events. When sufferers are the center of attention and attention is drawn to them by others, this causes them enormous stress. These situations evoke reactions that can significantly damage the sufferer's self-esteem and social life. Therefore, they often avoid social gatherings or similar situations altogether. This includes avoiding eye contact or leaving certain events early.

It is important to react consciously to such reactions. A certain amount of empathy and understanding must be conveyed so that affected individuals do not distance themselves further in interpersonal situations.

Understanding anxiety disorders

People with social anxiety usually know that their fears are irrational, that they are not based on facts and do not make sense. Yet the fears persist. Feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, as well as physical symptoms such as sleep and appetite disturbances, can also produce depression in sufferers and further aggravate the condition. Therefore, the phobia should not be downplayed. Instead, in such stressful situations, one can try to eliminate the source of anxiety, such as diverting attention away from the person. It is not helpful to force the person to face their fears at such a moment.

Ways out of social phobia

Cognitive-behavioral therapy has proven to be extremely successful for social anxiety. It offers the possibility of permanently changing neural pathways in the brain of the affected person. Social phobia, as well as other anxiety disorders, can be successfully treated in this way today. The treatments should include active self-help groups. There, members can work on their anxiety hierarchies in the group and later in real-life situations with other group members. In addition, drug treatments or stress management interventions can be used. Social anxiety is a treatable condition and can be overcome with the help of effective therapy, work, and patience. When seeking help, a specialist should be consulted. However, finding experts can be a hurdle for many sufferers. There are few treatment facilities for people with persistent anxiety disorder.

Therapy saves lives

Sufferers did not choose their condition and must manage their social anxiety or severe social phobia on a daily basis. It makes up a large part of their lives, especially if they are unwilling or unable to seek treatment. Without therapy, mental health and therefore overall well-being can deteriorate significantly.

The longer the sufferer avoids social contact or interaction, avoids difficult situations and distances themselves from those around them, the more complicated the prospect of recovery

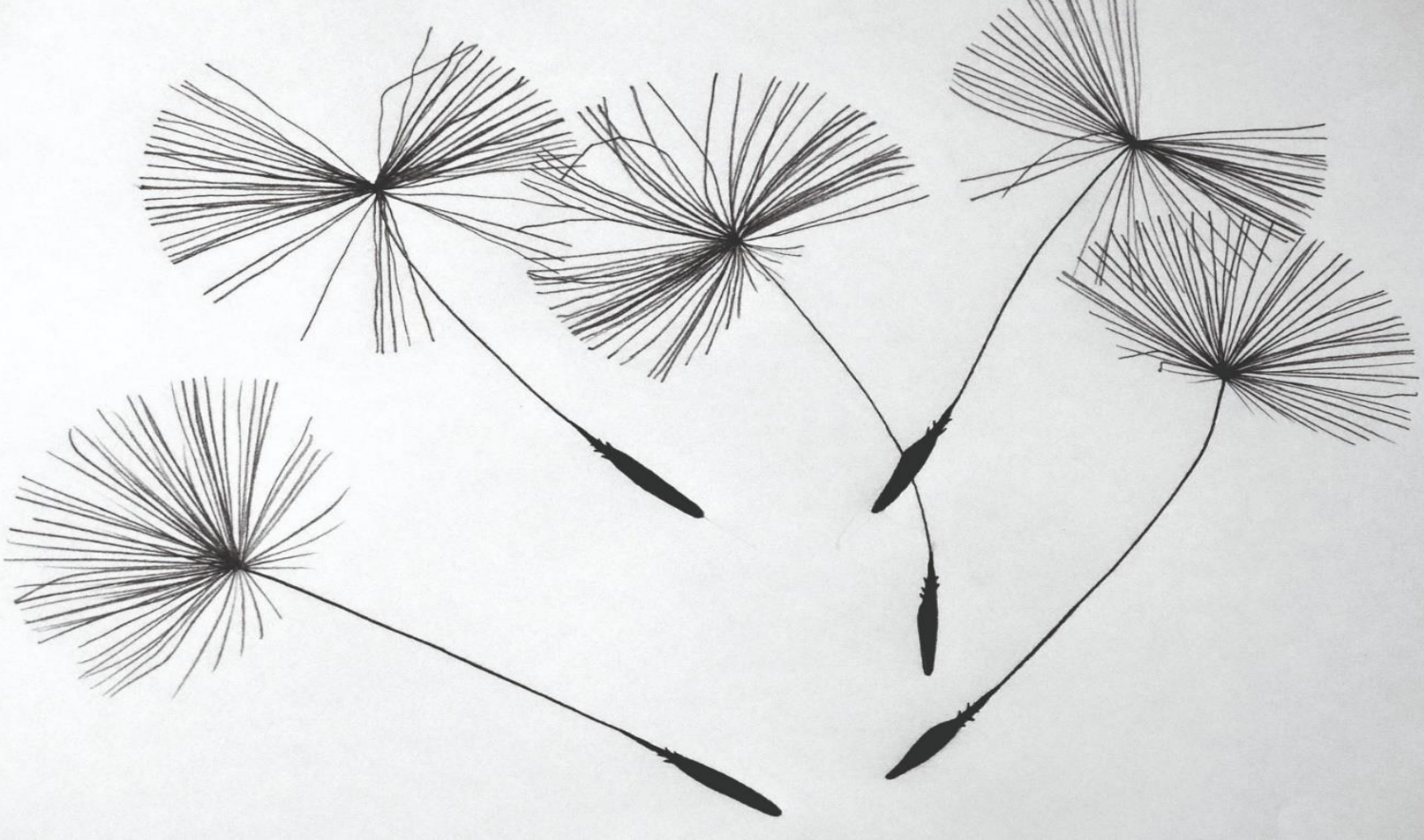
becomes. Fellow human beings can provide supportive help on the road to recovery, for example in seeking therapy, but the sufferer must nevertheless demonstrate a strong will and independent commitment to self-healing.

Need help? These emergency contacts will help:

- Free and anonymous telephone counselling: 0800-111 0 111 or 0800-111 0 222 and online telefonseelsorge.de.
- Information telephone of the Deutsche Depressionshilfe: 0800-33 44 533 and online at deutsche-depressionshilfe.de
- Find self-help groups in the vicinity: NAKOS at (030) 31 01 89 60
- MedCall: 0711-7875-3966 provides support in finding a therapy place
- Search for doctors and psychotherapists: www.arztsuche.kvb.de or www.therapie.de/psyche/info/
- Number against sorrow (children and young people): 116 111

Ulm region:

- Emergency outpatient clinic of the Department of Psychiatry in Ulm: 0731 500-61500
- Counseling by BIZEPS for HNU students: christoph.giebeler@hnu.de
- Psychosocial counseling center PBS for students: Mail to pbs@studierendenwerk-ulm.de or 0731 50-23811
- Emotions Anonymous self-help in Ulm: 07351 76223
- Youth counseling center of the city of Ulm: 0731 62080 or 0731 161-5450



So near and yet so far

Tired and disappointed, Anna made her way home. She had been looking forward to this evening for a long time, because she received an invitation to a friend's house party. Anna loved meeting new people at parties. She also secretly hoped that after three years of being single, she would finally meet a good-looking man she liked. But unfortunately, the "party" turned out to be more of a girls' night out - boring topics included. So, without further ado, she invented an excuse to go home early.

Full of thoughts about what she still had to do on the weekend, she hadn't noticed that a group of party animals was walking in front of her. Suddenly, however, Anna recognized a friend and called out, "Hey Ben, it's me." Ben's face lit up and he unceremoniously fell into her arms full of friends, "What are you doing here? We're on our way to a club. Are you coming?" Ben's drunken good mood elated Anna and without further ado she decided to throw her plans for the weekend out the window and join the group. Ben introduced Anna to his round, but suddenly her brain stopped, she felt cold as well as warm at the same time, her heart was beating wildly, she was fascinated by the man standing in front of her. Anna knew exactly what was happening to her at that moment. She called this one moment her "boom moment". She didn't believe in love at first sight, because love, in her opinion, develops over time. But during her boom moment, Anna knew she was directly attracted to this one man in the round. He introduced himself as Simon and wanted to know who she was. In an embarrassed voice, she introduced herself as Anna. Since that second, there had hardly been a moment that night when they hadn't celebrated, talked, or laughed together. When the lights suddenly came on in the club early in the morning, they were quite surprised that the night was already over. At the exit, Anna spotted her ride, which she had organized in advance. She rummaged an old gum wrapper out of her handbag and asked a bouncer for a pen. Without further ado, she ran to Simon, gave him a kiss on the cheek as a farewell, and meanwhile pressed a piece of paper with a message into his hand: "My cell phone number - don't forget me."

The next morning, Anna was hungover, of course, but the hangover faded into the background as she thought about the night and Simon in particular. She wondered if he would get in touch or if it should remain with a one-time night at the club. Sure enough, as the day progressed, a message popped up from a strange number, "At 6:00 pm at the fountain at Rathausplatz. Looking forward!" One cry of joy later, she was overwhelmed by her feelings, because she knew exactly from whom the message had come. Anna arrived at the agreed meeting point and joyfully spotted Simon, who greeted her with a beaming smile plus a warm hug. At first they were both very embarrassed, but once the first words were spoken, there was no stopping them. Simon and Anna talked about God and the world, always finding new topics to keep the conversation going. It turned out that Simon was just visiting his friend Ben and was going back to his home 100 km away tomorrow morning. They promised each other to stay in touch anyway and were already planning the next meeting. It did not remain only with a meeting, because they arranged themselves as often as they could. The two of them did a lot and enjoyed their togetherness. Anna had to admit to herself that it was no longer just this certain attraction, but that she had fallen head over heels in love with Simon. She was overwhelmed by her feelings, as she had not believed that she could fall in love with a man so much again.

While walking with Simon, Anna talked about how much she enjoyed her time with him and how she had fallen in love with him. Abruptly Simon stopped, looked deep into her eyes, took her head in his hands and kissed her tenderly. Further words were not necessary to admit to themselves that this was the beginning of their love.

Anna quickly realized that she was in the middle of a long-distance relationship. A relationship with a person you love, but not living in close proximity, so no daily life together was possible. This turned out to be more difficult than expected. She worked a lot on her bachelor thesis while he was often on the road for days at a time all over Germany. Sometimes both had only sparse contact for several days, and on the weekend there was not always time for a meeting.

Anna suffered from this. She had the feeling that they were both losing each other instead of strengthening their relationship. She brought up the subject again and again, but at some point Simon went into overdrive. She couldn't reach him anymore. Her thoughts kept going in circles, pondering how she could save this relationship. In the end, she couldn't find a way out. She toyed with the idea of ending the relationship. Simon sensed that Anna was distancing herself from him more and more. He didn't understand the problem and kept arguing that in a relationship you also need your space and don't have to be in contact day and night. But Anna had had enough! The relationship frustrated her more than it made her happy and so she ended it.

Relief, pride and a great sense of satisfaction - Anna had her bachelor's degree in her pocket and all doors were now open to her. She still didn't have the right partner by her side, but she convinced herself that she could manage just fine on her own. A few weeks later, she landed a coveted junior manager job and was full of anticipation. The work was very demanding for Anna, but she quickly enjoyed taking on responsibility and her superiors were pleased with her. So much so, in fact, that she was allowed to take on a project for a new client. She was preparing everything for the first meeting when there was a knock at her office door. Anna was about to greet her new client when her heart suddenly dropped in shock. "Simon!" They both stared at each other open-mouthed for seconds.

Was it joy, anger or sadness? Anna was no longer in control of her emotions and a tear flowed down her cheek. Simon touched her gently on the shoulder and led her into her office. When they were out of sight of the other colleagues, Simon took her in his arms. No one made any move to break up this intimate situation. Lying in his arms, Anna felt an inner peace she hadn't had since their breakup. She realized how much she missed Simon. Simon and Anna needed a clear head and decided to go for a walk. They talked about how they had been during the time after the breakup. Simon suffered a lot because he had to admit to himself that he should have tried harder. He didn't realize that a long-distance relationship had to be approached differently; after all, he was used to his space as a single man. He asked her for a second chance. Anna was agitated and didn't know what to say to that. Simon sensed this and suggested that she think about it until the weekend. If she decided to go with him, he would be waiting at 6 p.m. on Saturday, where it all started. The days passed and Anna didn't know how to decide. She had tried the long-distance relationship, but it hadn't worked. On the other hand, Simon thought he was going about it the wrong way. Saturday came and she still doubted. Anna decided to go to the fountain at the town hall square and listen to her heart, despite her uncertainty. Just before their agreed meeting place, Anna stopped. She spotted Simon standing by the fountain, tense and full of worry. Her heart became heavy as lead. When Simon looked up and saw her, she ran as if there was no stopping her, jumped into his arms and he spun her around in circles full of joy, kissed her and never let her go!