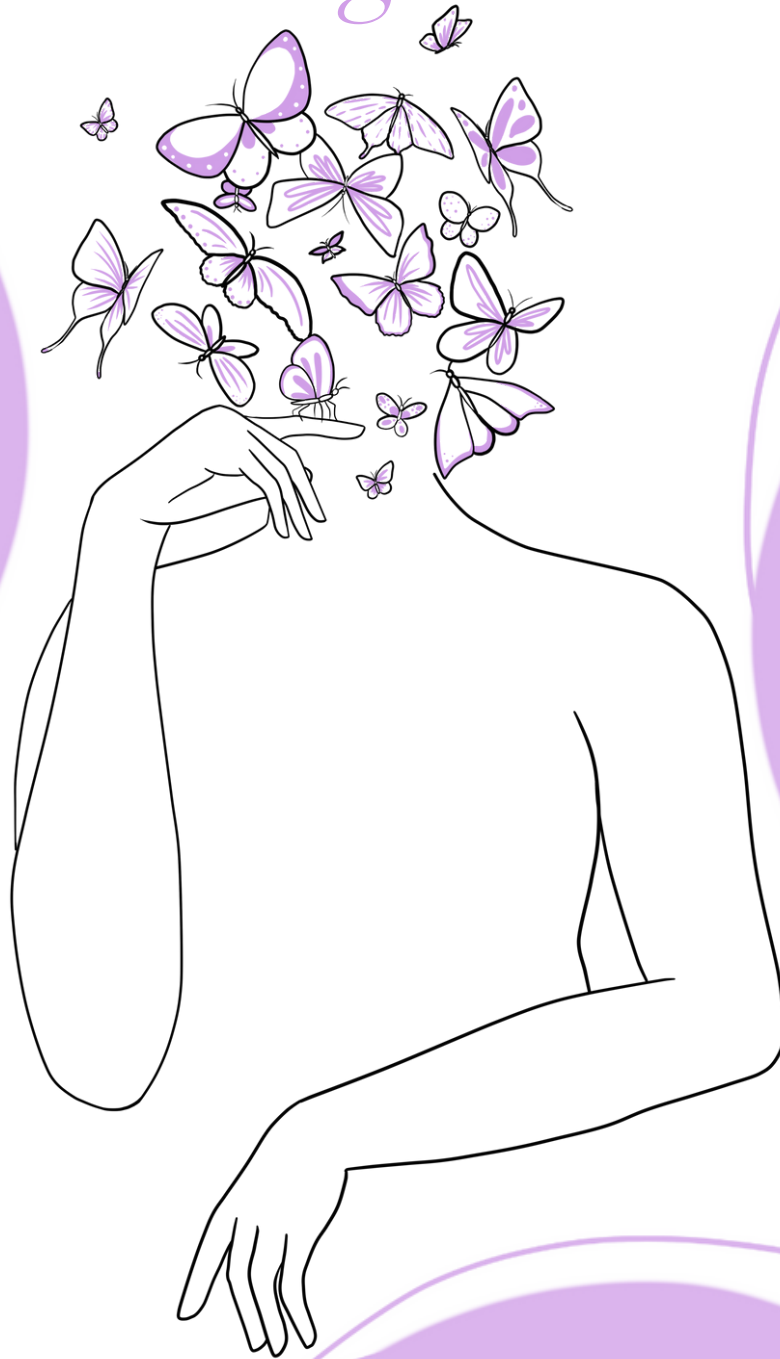


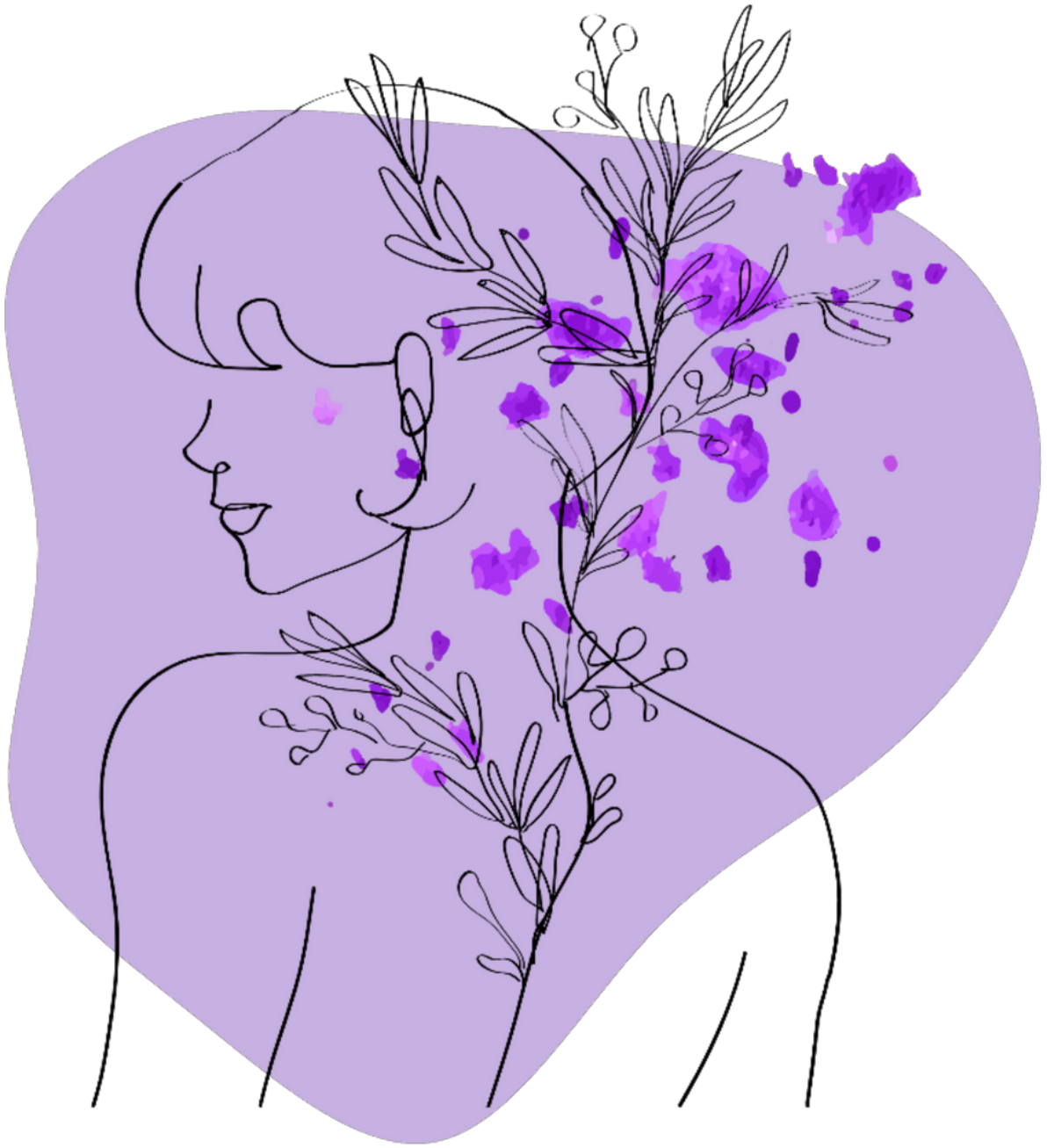
COLLECTIVE *thoughts.*

"It is like a tsunami. It does not take control immediately. Instead, it creeps into your life and announces its unavoidability slowly."



"It's up to us, younger generations, to stand up, to be 'too' loud, to be 'too' bold, just to be too much of everything to differentiate ourselves from others."

"People perform miracles when they have something to live for. I did not lose anything, because nothing is ever really lost to us as long as we remember it."



Note From the Editor

Welcome to *Collective Thoughts*, our magazine focused on highlighting creative and personal writing. Over the past two years, the Collective team has grown, and our brand has morphed. We are excited to embrace the new changes, which include two versions of our magazines.

There seems to be a shift in the atmosphere. A change between the seasons is upon us. For the past few weeks, we have had a rare few weeks of sun and cloud-less sky. That's the beauty of spring in The Netherlands. The minute the sun begins to shine you can feel a shift in the outlook of those around you. We flock to the outdoors, taking in the sunshine. We begin to appreciate the simplicity in the world around us. The spring is a reminder of this, as we begin to go outside more and more. A reminder that life is more than school or our work. That those connections we make with those around us, the extra smile you give as you check out, the small talk with your neighbor, and connecting with friends, are what is important.

Like us all, *Collective* is embracing this stage of development. I would like to thank the amazing team for creating yet another beautiful edition and helping in bringing *Collective* into this new stage. The words and perspectives of the authors bring us new perspectives and insights into the world around us. I truly hope you enjoy this edition and join me in embracing a new lens. Wishing you a happy read!

Fenna Milbauer

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CONTENTS

Page 3

Article

When Is Enough Actually Enough?

By Irene Ojeda Pérez & Amaal Ali

Page 6

Article

Missing Pieces

By Flavia Tofan

Page 9

Article

The Unbearable Weight of Water

By Ju Laclau Massaglia

Page 12

Article

Challenge Accepted: Look At Your
Wardrobe From A Different Perspective

By Anastasia Iarovaia

Page 15

Article

Authenticity Over Approval

By Kristina Cakova

When is enough actually enough?



“Treat others like you wish you were treated” I have always been told, but how do I want to be treated? I don’t know. Yes, of course, the phrase “with kindness” comes to mind, but I wouldn’t be able to define what daily acts portray kindness without reflecting first. And this is something that worries me.

I have been raised to be empathetic and understanding, but more often than not I find myself in situations where people are far from empathetic or understanding towards me. I don’t remember anyone telling me how to handle myself in those circumstances, so I just try to be as tolerant as I can. Nevertheless, this usually takes me into a vicious cycle: the more tolerant I am, the worse they treat me. It’s like watching YouTube late at night, you don’t know how you got to a video of how Atlantis sank in the ocean, but you got there yourself.



One could argue that I am not the one with the problem. At the end of the day, it is they who are not being nice to me, but I would disagree. Even though not letting situations escalate and avoiding confrontation at all costs was deeply engraved in my education, I wouldn’t blame that either.

"I still want to prevent problems from escalating, yet I don't want to become someone's punching bag and currently, I am allowing them to do so."

And here is where I believe I was making a mistake myself. I hadn’t stopped, I hadn’t reflected. I was letting others walk all over me because I wanted to accommodate them without accounting for my own feelings and beliefs. I didn’t even know where my limits lay. All in all, I wasn’t setting boundaries.

Boundaries, yes, it can sound scary. However, I believe it is the only way to teach others how to interact with you in a healthy way.

"The more you know yourself and your principles, the easier time you are going to have getting the message across."

These boundaries are not always going to be respected, some people may test them or surpass them all together. And that is the crucial moment when you need to hold on to yourself and what you need.

People are not aware of this. They have no clue. For all they know, your principles and wishes could align perfectly with theirs. One quote I often see on Twitter is “if I have to ask for it, I don’t want it anymore”, what are we doing wrong? Your boyfriend is not able to read the future yet, Susan, he is not going to know how you want daisies for your birthday unless you communicate your wishes.

You owe yourself enough respect to listen to yourself/your needs. Boundaries are hard to establish and even harder to maintain, I would say. But they are the common trait of those with high self-respect. You have heard it being said a million times that the only person that is going to accompany you for the rest of your life is yourself, I bet. Well, I don’t know about you, but

I would rather be at war with the rest of the world and at peace within than the other way around.

Not everyone that makes you uncomfortable is trying to do so, and that is something you must take into consideration. Yet, if you have repeatedly communicated with someone about your limits and they are not listening, please know it is not your fault and seek professional help if the situation requires it, gaslighting happens more often than we think. You deserve to be heard and I wish this wasn't a battle you have to fight the rest of your life, but you owe it to yourself to know when enough is actually enough for you.

Understanding how to set boundaries is essential for building and maintaining healthy relationships.

"Setting boundaries is a way of self-care, by doing so you are taking care of your mental and emotional wellbeing."

Not only are healthy boundaries a way of practicing self-care, but they can also help people create their own identity, define their individuality, and can allow establishing what they will (not) be responsible/held accountable for.

There are feelings that arise when you do not understand how to set boundaries or maintain healthy boundaries. As a result, your limits will continuously be pushed; which will result in you experiencing feelings such as resentment, disappointment, and anger more often.

Unhealthy boundaries are characterized by:

- Sharing too much too soon or, at the other end of the spectrum, closing yourself off and not expressing your needs and wants. Feeling responsible for others' happiness.
- Weak sense of your own identity.
- You base how you feel about yourself on how others treat you.
- You allow others to make decisions for you;

consequently, you feel powerless and do not take responsibility for your own life.

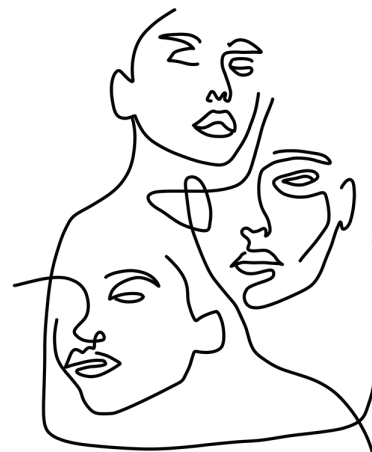
Subsequently, boundaries are frequently emotional or psychological but they can also be physical. For example, preferring to decline physical contact with a classmate or colleagues is a crucial boundary. This is just as important as establishing emotional boundaries.

An example of someone with healthy boundaries is, that they understand that communicating their expectations towards someone is helpful in two ways;

First, it indicates what behavior you are accepting from others, and second, it indicates what others can anticipate from you.

By having healthy boundaries, you might:

- share personal information appropriately (not too much or not too little)
- understand your personal needs and wants and know how to communicate them
- value your own opinions
- accept when others tell you "no"



Many of us have a mix of boundaries depending on the situation. For example, you might have strict boundaries at work and more loose ones at home or with family and friends. Prior to setting boundaries, it is important to be aware of the various types of boundaries that exist. According to research conducted by PsychCentral, the following 5 types of boundaries exist;

1. Physical: This refers to your personal space, your privacy, and your body. You might be someone who is comfortable with public displays of affection (hugs, kisses, and hand-holding), or you might be someone who prefers not to be touched in public.
2. Sexual: These are your expectations concerning intimacy. Sexual comments and touches might be uncomfortable for you.
3. Intellectual: These boundaries concern your thoughts and beliefs. Intellectual boundaries are not respected when someone dismisses another person's ideas and opinions.
4. Emotional: This refers to a person's feelings.

You might not feel comfortable sharing your feelings about everything with a friend or partner. Instead, you prefer to share gradually over time.

5. Financial: This one, as you guessed, is all about money. If you like to save money – not spend it on trendy fashions – you might not want to loan money to a friend who does

Ultimately, it is up to you to decide whether you will take on this challenge that will eventually serve you in life for the better or push it aside and do yourself a disservice. It is never too late to set boundaries. As mentioned before, a part of self-care is being selfish and putting yourself first. If you ever feel selfish while sticking to your boundaries remind yourself that you have every right to be. Who will put your mental and emotional wellbeing first, if not you yourself? Get comfortable with becoming your number 1 priority and get comfortable with verbalizing your boundaries. You cannot control others and force them to stick to your boundaries. But what you can do is decide to walk away and not deal with those individuals anymore. If someone cannot find it within themselves to respect your boundaries then are they really worth keeping in your life? Once again, this may be deemed as selfish and so what if it is? You have a right to be selfish because if you're not going to stick to your boundaries then who will?

Irene Ojeda Pérez



Irene is originally from Gran Canaria, Spain. She is an Industrial Design Engineering student currently working in her graduation project at DeWarmte. Painting and reading have always been passions of hers.

Amaal Ali



Amaal is a fourth year IPM student, born and raised in the city of the Hague. As a hobby, she loves to read books, and watch movies. Her interest in Collective grew when she noticed the variety in stories.

MISSING pieces

Dear You Know Who,

It has been a while since I talked about this subject. As time passes by, there are some parts of myself that I want to take with me on my next journeys, but that is impossible, unfortunately. I was never the best at the game, but I was working hard to keep up with the others.

I started pretty late, because of different circumstances, (I am not writing this to put the blame on somebody or to accuse that I did not start earlier, but there are some important facts in this story), but after I truly entered the game, I understood what being truly alive means. I had to take it from zero two times. The first time was my beginning as a true player. The second was after I got sick and I was forbidden to play any sport, especially at a professional level, for 12 months. I chose to wait and go back to my passion. I was back in the game pretty fast after that year thanks to an incredible coach who had the determination to give me back the time I had lost, introduced me to the person that raised me, and taught me what basketball is really about.

"I was there, full of joy and conquering my fears. That girl that finally found something that suited her, does not have her safe place anymore.."

She took me under her wing and accepted me for who I was. At my first training with her, I was really scared and from another planet. In less than 3 months, I went from sitting on the bench most of the official *games*, to getting to play at least half of the game time, and in less than 6 months I was part of the first 5 players, sometimes being on the court for an entire *game*. We did not win any medals or championships, but we were not the last ones either. We had really bad

representations and some unbelievable good ones.

I quickly understood that the financial power of the basketball club matters more than how good a team is. That did not bother me, because I was living off the adrenaline of the game. I was... there... I was there, full of joy and conquering my fears. That girl that finally found something that suited her, does not have her safe place anymore.



She was not the only one in that situation. She saw some of her teammates going through the same experience but walking different paths. Everyone got a chance to move up to the national league, where the requirements were higher, where there were girls brought in from foreign countries to play. It was hard to compete, to build your way up to the first 5 once again. Some did not endure it and quit, others remained, including me, the little girl.

I was so close to playing and proving myself on the field, I was so close to scoring that first point in the big league. I will never forget that one cold night when the whole team was supposed to have training before a big game, the big game where I was supposed to play. I was on the list to enter the court, not to stay on the side. I found the balance, that little girl that I was, found the balance. We were invited into the conference room. And they told us that they did everything possible, but the municipality is not going to finance the club anymore and they have to give up a team, us or

the boys.

They gave up on us. I still do not understand why, because we brought better results than the boys and 70% of the trophies were brought home by the girls. I did not dig deeper to find out what the problems were between the municipality and the club, because in my country it's common knowledge that the institutions do not invest in sports, only discourage them, then congratulate the athletes when they have incredible results.

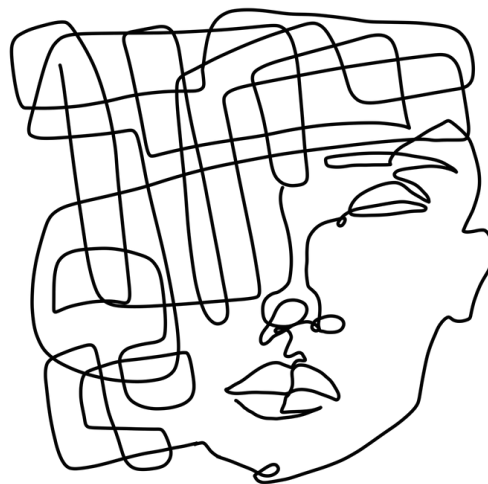
But I remember this. I heard the crack inside my soul. It was deafening. The girls that were my teammates since the beginning, heard their dreams shattering in their hearts. It was the end for us, there was no other chance for us to... continue. We did not have anywhere to go to play at that level. Not even for other teams from other cities. I did not react, I just got up with the others when the meeting was over. We were supposed to bring back the equipment. The only time I had to change my player number, 22, was when I was transferred to the higher league and it was not available to continue with it, so 15 became my new friend. In my mind, 22 is still on my back whenever I play. So, I would not give up on some of the last things that might link me to myself. I stepped on that matchfield one more time on my way to the exit. I stopped to take one more deep breath and let go of those pieces that broke from my soul. I let them fall on that court.

"That girl that I was talking about earlier, that girl that was me, remained there, and she took those broken pieces with her. She continued playing but never came back to me. Only in my memories and stories. "

That girl that I was talking about earlier, that girl that was me, remained there, and she took those broken pieces with her. She continued playing but never came back to me. Only in my memories and stories.

I took my bag and went for a long walk home. I did not cry, I did not listen to music, I did not think. I was walking with the echo of that crack following me around. That little *girl* is still on that court, I can feel her every time I pass by.

She left me with every bit of passion linked to her, to that *game*, to basketball. The dream was to play for as much as she could, to develop herself as a person, and allow herself to be her true self. The dream was to take those pieces with her while growing up, never to lose that joy of the *game*, not even as an adult.



Now I live only with the memories of those times. I tried to go back to *the game*, but it was not possible anymore. The door is shut and I cannot open it again, no matter how hard I try. I end up hurting myself, every time I try. Shouting for those pieces of myself that I miss so much. There are times when I shut my eyes and imagine reliving those moments. It's like I can feel that adrenaline again. I being to practice the moves. I am being blocked, I pass the ball, my teammate receives it, I run like my life is on the line. I can barely breathe from the effort. We score, the other team has the ball, we defend ourselves. The coach is shouting at me to move my feet and not rest in defence. I listen. Someone is stealing the ball. Our coach is encouraging us. We have a chance to counterattack. I run and run. I see the ball coming, I catch it and try to go for the basket. A player is trying to block

me and I pass the ball at the last moment. We score. Time is up, I open my eyes.

I cannot be a part of a team that wins or loses anymore. I am not wearing my number, 22, or any other. I am by myself, in my room, trying to hang on to those experiences a little longer, but smiling. I was lucky enough to experience that. There will always be a part of me that will regret that I could not stay in that world for longer, or that the people that will love me or are loving me now do not get to meet that side of me. I tried other sports after basketball, I am still searching for that source of adrenaline, but nothing will live up to that. I still compare some feelings to basketball from time to time, even if I know it is not quite healthy. Basketball is a feeling for me, not simply a sport. But I am smiling. That smile confirms the fact that basketball taught me to live every experience to the fullest for as long as it lasts. It's beautiful being lucky enough to look back at the past and have something that I miss and enjoy the presence of memories. Maybe I will be reunited with the little *girl* sometime in the most unexpected way. I will hug her, laugh, cry, feel and welcome her back for as long as it is possible. Maybe I will be ready to welcome her back forever.

"People perform miracles when they have something to live for. I did not lose anything, because nothing is ever really lost to us as long as we remember it. "

I remembered that dream of hers and took it to a deeper level. I am trying to find out what I love to do. I am still lost a little bit. I want a dream that is making me work on myself. I have a vague idea. What I know so far is that... basketball taught me how it is to have something that I want to carry with me my whole life. Now is the time to choose a mission in life that I want to dedicate myself to fully. People perform miracles when they have something to live for. I did not lose anything, because nothing is ever really lost to us as long as we remember it.

With sincerity, joy and tears,

A dreamer



Flavia Ioana Tofan

Flavia is an International Business student in her third year. She loves to read, play basketball, write and make her loved ones smile. She tries to describe the interaction between people and their feelings, even if sometimes it seems that there are no words for it.

the unbearable WEIGHT of water

It is like a tsunami. It does not take control immediately. Instead, it creeps into your life and announces its unavailability slowly. First, as a slight leg trembling in class that could easily go unnoticed. Then it evolves into a constant need to zone out to avoid getting overwhelmed. It might be perceived as nothing but a sign of tiredness and stress by the inexperienced eye, but when the fuzzy mind takes over, I already know what is coming.

“It is like a tsunami. It does not take control immediately. Instead, it creeps into your life and announces its unavailability slowly.”

Sometimes pressure in the chest and an unsettled stomach show up not long after and I try to fight it. I try to dance the tension away, try to sleep more, go for a walk, drink more water and anything the internet might even remotely recommend; all in a desperate but unsuccessful attempt to get it to stop. But there is no stopping the abnormal ocean activity once it has started, and neither is there a possibility to stop the way my body is taking over my life. So I start blaming myself. Why didn't I do more exercise? Why did I drink that last coffee yesterday? Why did I push that extra meeting into my schedule? Why did I procrastinate that assignment so much?

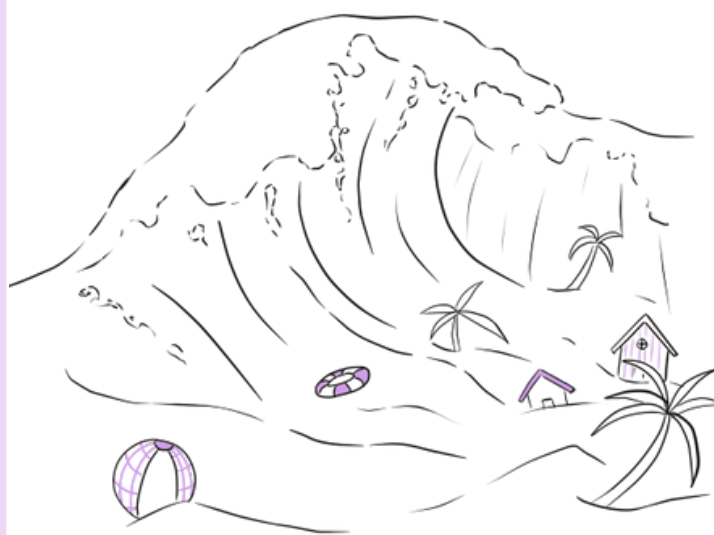
When I cannot handle the anticipation and waiting anymore, I try to force it to happen,

push the tsunami to strike sooner; when I find it more convenient, when it would make life easier for me. It has never worked, not really, and why would it? At the end of the day, none of that matters to the tide, which, even after our best attempts to tame it -forcing it into artificial shores and knee-deep canals- comes back to prove that the strength of nature far exceeds us. So I have to live with it until the universe, my body or whatever force this feeling actually listens to decides it is time.



The days stretch into a mass of blurry symptoms and sleepless nights. The waiting takes its toll in every aspect of life: I can't study, I forget to eat, I isolate myself and I slowly start crumbling down in the wake of the strike. During those days I try my best to mask the symptoms and lock them out of sight. I spend my classes trying to stay still

and looking at the front. I try to take notes or doodle on the margins to stay focused. I get out of bed early and accept food from others so as not to arouse any questions or suspicions. Second guessing everything I do becomes the most time-consuming activity in my days as I try to fade away into the background.



But then, when I least expect it, the tide retreats, my heart starts to beat faster, my breathing becomes shallow and I know I need to rush my way to the closest thing to privacy I can find. Before I can do anything to help it, I'm lying on the ground, hugging my knees, rocking myself back and forth. The tide is completely out of sight and I close my eyes as the wall-like cascade approaches the shore, bringing with it, its unavoidable feeling of overwhelming destruction.

When the water first impacts the ground, I barely notice the tears streaming down my face and the knot that blocks my throat, my whole attention is focused on my lack of air. I am going to die. The feeling that I might never finish writing a novel or travel around Europe with a repurposed bus. I will never do anything. My life will be reduced to a few worthless years. I am going to die. I will never see my friends or hug my grandma again.

This is it.

The pressure in my chest is as unbearable as the desperation that takes over my body and drives it unauthorised. I am submerged under the pressure of the cascades of water that keep on violently hitting the earth, gasping for air from inside the turbulent mass of water, desperately trying to reach the surface. But when I'm lying on the floor, stripped into my most vulnerable form, there is no surface, there is no pocket of air. The only way out is to push through.

The question is: do I want to push through? The crying, trembling, gasping, pounding mass that is lying on the floor seems to be far away now. I am looking at it from afar as my thoughts become the only thing that is real. I was never good enough. They are right, I am just lucky: lucky to be here, lucky to have made it this far.

“But when I’m lying on the floor, stripped into my most vulnerable form, there is no surface, there is no pocket of air. The only way out is to push through.”

I don't deserve what I got and, because of that, it can be gone as quickly as it appeared in my life. Someone will realise that I don't deserve it and it will all crumble down around me. The life that I built, the relationships that make it worth living, the dreams I hope to make a reality one day are all pieces of debris, lying around me, useless and broken; just like me.

I usually lie there for an eternity. There is no reason to push through, no reason to get back up on my feet and keep moving forward, no reason to try if I will never be good enough in the eyes of others or in my own. Somewhere far away my breathing is shallow, my face is

covered in tears and my chest aches.

“I try to tell myself beautiful things: some of them I believe and some I might never even start to fathom, but I say them anyway.”

But then something happens -maybe someone comes in or a thought breaks the force that keeps the water coming- and everything seems to simmer down the slightest bit. Yet that is enough for me to see the hope at the end of the flood that is currently taking control of the city. Slowly I start returning into my body, moving one finger at a time. I try to tell myself beautiful things: some of them I believe and some I might never even start to fathom, but I say them anyway.

Once the first finger obeys, the rest of the hand follows and eventually I'm sitting down, pushing air into my lungs. My head feels like it was filled with helium and could float away any second, but it doesn't. Instead, it starts regaining its weight as the water slowly flows back to its righteous place in the ocean. The whole city is left in shackles. People can only count their losses and be thankful to have made it through.

I know that I have a lot of work to do if I want to reconstruct the city and maybe even make it tsunami-proof one day, but I can't think of that at that time. The only thing I can do is sit there and tell myself that I made it through and that everything will be alright, and that thought -like me- will have to be enough.

Ju Laclau Massaglia

Ju likes to describe herself as a work in progress. Being a person who gets bored easily, she learnt at a young age that the best way to stay entertained is to look for the next adventure, but one thing never changes: she can't image her life without writing. Her interest in meeting amazing people, such as the ones she found in Collective, is only surpassed by her desire to hear their stories over a cup of tea, coffee or hot chocolate.



challenge accepted

look at your wardrobe from a different perspective

Have you ever considered how much of an emotional impact our wardrobes have on us? All these items hanging in our wardrobes are destined for all sorts of occasions: customized sweatshirts reminding us of happy moments, beach clothes waiting for the summer season to come, special occasion items kept for the most promising events of our lives. There are also “items-burdens” that take up space for years waiting for their turn to come which never do as they get replaced by new clothes that promise a fresh start and a new chapter to move on from anything that hurt us in the past.



Nowadays, we rarely go shopping when in need of a specific item. Instead, our mindsets towards fashion and style have switched to a new level: we consider shopping as a form of stress relief, creating new memories, pleasing, and treating ourselves. That tendency has reached such a high level that in society, we consider it normal, referring to it as “retail therapy” (shopping with the primary purpose of improving buyers' mood or disposition) or “impulse-buying behavior”.

In these moments one can barely think about sustainability, fast fashion issues, or the fact that such actions only lead to over-complicating our lives. While looking for a quick fix, we tend to create only more instability. Stress at a new job can't be fixed by purchasing a new blazer as well as the hard work for a thesis deadline won't be softened with a purchase of a new bag. It's a quick fix, it won't last.

“While looking for a quick fix, we tend to create only more instability.”

I love fashion with all my heart, and it affects most parts of my life – from daily conversations with friends to my career, while looking at it from customers' and marketers' perspectives. In addition, I faced stress and uncertainty with the way I dress and the clothes I choose to wear for a long time. That issue made me realize I needed to start looking at my wardrobe from a different perspective – that's when I found the book titled “Project 333” that changed my life and my dressing attitude forever.



So, what's project 333?

Project 333 is a fashion challenge where, for 3 months, you choose to wear only 33 items - these include clothing, accessories, jewelry, and shoes. In other words, it's a challenge for cleansing your wardrobe and your life! It was brought to life by a talented author and blogger, Courtney Carver, who invented it for multiple purposes such as saving time, money and building up self-confidence.

“It’s a challenge for cleansing your wardrobe and your life!”

However, Project 333 isn't directly connected to fashion or style. It's dedicated to realizing how much easier life can be with a changed mindset from desiring more clothes to letting go of burdens and embracing a new, lighter life.

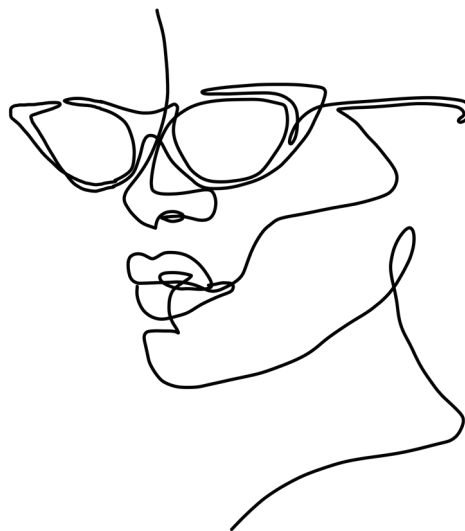
“*Less is so much more*” - this message is spread throughout the whole book and I find its meaning very touching. Like the jeans you could fit in if you'd start going to the gym, gifts that don't match our taste, and clothes that bring up old memories. Keeping half of your wardrobe unworn and feeling guilty about not wearing it. Holding onto clothes because of sentimental value. All that is holding us back from the people we want to be.

The beauty of the challenge is that you are able to wear your favorite clothes and there is no necessity to change your style. Some people created their capsules existing entirely out of black items. It also is certainly not a competition and there are no winners, there's just the opportunity of obtaining a new way of looking at fashion.

Why take on this challenge?

- To reduce physical and emotional clutter that comes with your wardrobe
- Have my life transformed by adjusting my perception of the wardrobe

- Uncover a major source of stress in my life
- Become more sustainable and contribute to helping the planet from your side (The world consumes 80 billion new pieces of clothing every year)
- Get rid of unnecessary burdens that have weighed you down for in the past and distracted you from what really matters



My experience

I discovered this challenge last summer and tried being part of it right away, counting on the fact that clothing-wise it's going to be easier than during winter. However, I miscalculated that summer was also a season of traveling, which along with the beauty of new emotions entails wardrobe changes. Here's what happened in my case: Each of the 3 months I spent in a different country with opposite weather conditions, ranging from 15 degrees and rain to the hottest temperatures. However, every season brings its challenges.

All in all, I kept the challenge alive for 44 days and completely gave up while having to face the rainiest month of my life in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, I did not stop after the failure and went on to plan my future autumn capsule. That challenge has eventually grown into a habit that simplifies my life as a self-care routine.

What has Project 333 changed in me?

I could talk forever about the new vision I got of what I wear however, these are the most significant changes I noticed:

- A relief from running late every morning after trying on several outfits
- Release from the feeling that I didn't have enough or wasn't enough
- A transformation, not only of the inside of the closet but also the way i view my clothes and shopping habits
- My wardrobe now reflects my style and my sustainable values, and the habit of buying less gives me the opportunity to invest more in responsible brands

My favorite part is that while being connected to fashion, the base of the challenge can be applied to any other area of our lives. "We all must start somewhere" – no matter what the challenge or the goal is, take a step forward, and it will get easier. Or the fact that cleaning up the space around you and in your mind is the first step for better results.

Some more wisdom from the book:

- There will never be an item of clothing that will make people see you as someone who you're not
- Shopping won't fix any problems
- Having an emotional relationship with clothing doesn't lead to any good
- There's an Instagram account of Project 333 where you can always find support and get inspired by the beauty and impact of that idea:

https://instagram.com/project333?utm_medium=copy_link

I started writing this article as a book review which made me realize how much power something that simple can have over us, like getting dressed one or multiple times a day. How many other areas in life could have the same impact on our daily routine and keep us away from our dreams, better results, and our true selves?

The experience and the insights I gained from this fashion challenge make me hold my breath in anticipation of more projects like this one that could change millions of lives of those ready to take risks and dive right into it.

Anastasia Iarovaia

**She lives by the following words:
What if you knew the world would stop existing after 7 days? What would you do? What would be the solution to finding happiness? Achieving a dream? Doing the best you can to enjoy every day? It seems that unless there's a nudge we keep finding excuses. But the truth is there is only one time for a change and it's right now.**



authenticity OVER approval

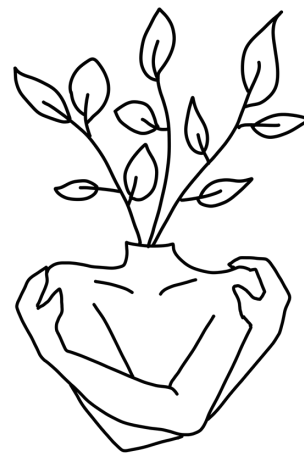
Would it be better pretending to be someone else to satisfy the ever pressuring social needs rather than living the most authentic lives our body, mind and soul long for? Maybe for some this might be a shocking question to ask as you might have been lucky enough to never worry about such a dilemma.

"We all do carry our own weight of problems, and their severity shouldn't be measured on universal scale."

For me, this shocking reality of how our thinking and decision-making can be shaped by our inner circle or even complete strangers has especially intensified over the month that I have spent in my home country during Christmas time. The shock was mostly caused thanks to the fact that I got so used to being myself in the Netherlands, surrounded by inspirational people, having no family members or former friends around to judge any of my study, work or romantic life choices. The freedom that moving across Europe has brought to my life has opened my eyes enormously.

But why is it that one has to move countries and leave the people closest to them behind to find ultimate happiness and freedom? Shouldn't we all be concerned about living our best life, full of joy and being content with whatever we make out of it wherever we are, physically and mentally?

Well, maybe in a perfect world this would be an option but in a world full of people driven by comparison and social media feeding on our societal and personal differences such optimal conditions are nowhere to be reached.



Growing up in Slovakia has created a certain level of expectation that I felt inclined to meet in order to be 'happy'. Having quality education, good grades, staying out of trouble, only talking to 'socially acceptable' people as well as tattoos and piercings being completely off limits. Or at least as long as one wouldn't want to be referred to as an outcast, criminal or a lost cause.

All of these limitations preceded in my mind thanks to the group of people who made up my social circle, the glasses they put on my eyes and through which I saw distorted reality. Now, two years later, having gone through therapy, a healing process and months of searching for my own authentic self,

I am proud of the journey that made me realise there's so much more to life than the norms of what roles we should play in the society.

Naturally, the expectations may differ from country to country, from culture to culture and from society to society. However, there is one thing all these artificial portrayals of power have in common. They all stem from avoiding uncertainty, instead it's the desire to fit into a bigger picture that impels them. The problem is that these outdated attempts for unity have brought more pain to the human kind that it did prosper.

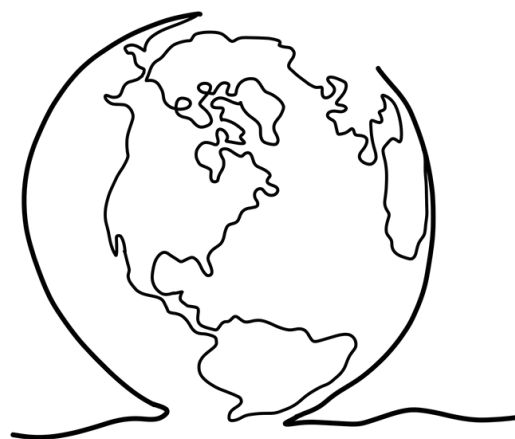
Shouldn't we all be concerned about living our best life, full of joy and being content with whatever we make out of it wherever we are, physically and mentally?"

Just take the example of marginalisation of anybody different to the set social norms that still in the 21st century cause immense suffering in the world. Of course, comparing serious matters such as marginalised groups or even discrimination to the personal life crisis one might have due to the social pressure isn't the most relevant thing to do. However, as one of my friends has once told me, we all do carry our own weight of problems, and their severity shouldn't be measured on universal scale.

"What happened to doing whatever you want with your life as long as you're happy and loved?"

The reason why I am referring to the social norms along with the expectations from our close circles is the relatedness of these two. Over the course of 22 years on this planet I have seen more than enough of my friends or total strangers, or even famous and important people falling into the claws of social wrath. Having their lives destroyed,

losing loved ones or in many cases even work, over their efforts to express their truest selves, breaking out of the constant carousel of living up to certain expectations. Get a good job, start a family, get a nice big house to sustain the family, never like a person of the same gender, never be too loud. What happened to doing whatever you want with your life as long as you're happy and loved? Does that only apply in cases where doing what makes us happy is something that makes the whole society content?



So many times in my life I have heard the same old story - always listen to your elders, they know what they are saying. Do they really? The majority of the time I feel as if they have no clue about what is best. The older, more experienced people certainly know how things were done for the past few decades, but are completely oblivious to what the coming generations are facing in the world right now.

The conditions the ongoing destruction of climate brings to us; the suffering, loss of lives and uncertainty the war in Europe has brought into our lives recently; what social media do to our mental health and how many women in several corners of the world are up to this date perceived as a commodity. Being sold and bought into slavery and unwanted, arranged marriages.

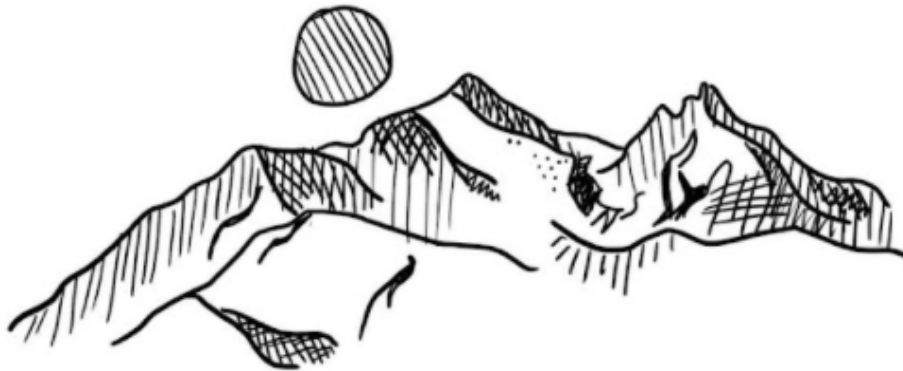
It's up to us, younger generations, to stand up, to be 'too' loud, to be 'too' bold, just to be too much of

everything to differentiate ourselves from others. To be our authentic selves and to point towards new pathways, eventually changing the way contemporary society works.

Being an outcast, a disappointment, the black sheep of the family are only a few terms that were expressed on my account. However, the more one realises the life we live is the only one we are promised today, and unfortunately there won't be another chance, the more rebellious, fearless and careless one becomes.

"It's up to us, younger generations, to stand up, to be 'too' loud, to be 'too' bold, just to be too much of everything to differentiate ourselves from others."

Yes, unfortunately, living life completely according to one self might mean leaving certain people or places behind, leaving our comfort zones, saying goodbye to safe habits and stability. But as long as that is the solution to our ultimate happiness, growing self-power and authenticity, it's definitely a risk to take.



Kristina Cakova

Kristina is an ICM student who loves to travel, meet new inspirational people and explore everything the world has to offer. In her free time she enjoys reading, writing and working on her self-empowerment journey. She believes the feminine power brings miracles, moves borders and transcends all societal stereotypes. She hopes for a world full of equality and peace.



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