

PRETTY

featuring
Rachael
Pope

smart

SPECIAL
EDITION

Elysha Ang
Sofia Ongele

WELCOME

TO THE NOV/DEC/JAN 2018 ISSUE OF

PRETTY

smart

magazine

In This Issue:

**Threading Twine's
Mission**

**Phillip
Picardi
&
Meredith
Talusán**

Tracy's Boba App

**Rachael Pope:
She Can Do It All**

Jacky Bethea: Tremors

Guilt.rb



after

from
the

Editor



Dear Readers,

Happy two year anniversary!

I know, it seems absurd. I've been learning, editing, and busting my butt for a total of two years on this magical platform. All I have to say is this: worth it.

I'm bursting with exuberance and dancing around my room to the HAIM sisters with my egg and bacon slippers on. I know I have readings, papers, historical graphs to look over, schedules to plan, NYFW contacts to email—but right now? I'm dancing. I can contain it most times, but others? I have to let it out.

Exhibit A: when I exited the doors of the One World Trade Center after my meetings with the ever incredible Meredith Talusan and Phillip Picardi. As I scurried a good distance away from the monumental building and towards the subway stairwell, I dialed my mom on the phone and exclaimed, "I did it! I finally did it!"

The ever-busy city-people were not enthused over my ecstatic movements. I was in the way, of course, but I couldn't seem to find a care.

Although I am well aware that Pretty Smart has been sharing my message of empowerment and body positivity for a while now, many people don't seem to understand that I am genuinely astounded when I look around and see the success it has cultivated. My mouth hangs low for a reason.

As a young junior in the rural Maine area, I didn't see a future beyond local broadcasting news. I once thought being a teacher was my only path. With one dream, a handful of interviews, and a 28 page display of brilliant women, my ideas began to stretch farther than the limits of my state once confined me in.

I'm grateful for my home, friends, family, the love of my life, and the support of my girls. Most of all, though, I'm grateful for the fact that you all decided to believe in me. Even when I'm silent for a couple of months, you decide to check in on me and ask me what you can do to help. Your kindness can crush mountains of doubt in my mind. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

So as I close this letter of gratitude and love, I want to challenge you this year. I want you to view yourself as brilliant, bold, and beautiful. I want you to look at yourself in the mirror and say, "I can do this." If there's anything I'm sure of, it's that anything is possible as long as you have a community of loving people in your corner. Build your community, let it grow, let others grow around you, and learn to love it all. Learn to love life.

With all the love in the world,

Branna ♡



Sofia Ongele isn't just a girl with a (k)alculator, she's a boss-girl with a dream programmed on a TI-84. The Californian native is a senior in high school, a two-time Kode with Klossy scholar, and a meme-queen on social media platforms. You may have seen her in a Klossy video unboxing a Kode with Klossy box or even in the pages of Girl's Life magazine. Now? Read about her in her own cover issue of Pretty Smart.

Elysha Ang, a freshman at Pace University and a level two scholar of Kode with Klossy, sat down with me at the Oculus in Lower Manhattan to tell her story. 2017 brought on a slew of successful feats for her—attending multiple STEM camps over the summer, meeting Katy Perry and Dua Lipa, and establishing a computer science major at Pace. She's making her dreams come true right in the heart of the city. I know she's going to take a big byte out of the Big Apple and turn it into something spectacular. Read about Elysha in her own cover issue.





Threading Twine

***The organization, built
by Kode with Klossy
scholars, is only
climbing higher up on
the ladder of success.***

***Their mission?:
Turning teens into
activists through
social media and
webinars.***

Bronna: What inspired you to start up Threading Twine?

Aarushi Machavarapu: I've always been passionate about social impact and equal rights from a young age, but never understood that I could take action as a youth until later on. I learned about social entrepreneurship in 2016 when I joined the team for TEDxYouth@Austin, a city-wide event put together by a team of youth. There, I met youth from surrounding schools and was thrown into an environment that consistently sought innovation and creativity. I immersed myself immediately, and looked up to all these other youth on the team that had a passion and did something with it to change the world.

After spending the latter portion of 2016 trying to think up ways I could impact the world around me, I thought up Threading Twine, pitched the idea to some friends, and started working on it! So I would definitely credit my aspiration to be a social entrepreneur to TEDxYouth@Austin and the incredible changemakers I met from being on the organizing team for the event.

Bronna: What is your mission through Threading Twine? What do you wish to accomplish?

Aarushi: Threading Twine's mission is to empower youth to be the best activists they can be by helping them create content (such as articles, videos, photo galleries, etc.) that is educational and meaningful. Additionally, we aim to achieve our mission by hosting monthly webinars to educate youth on how they can become more involved in order to be successful activists, and give them opportunities to meet and interact with global changemakers who we feature as guest speakers. Although Threading Twine is still at its beginning stages, we hope to accomplish this mission by getting as many youth as possible involved with our organization.

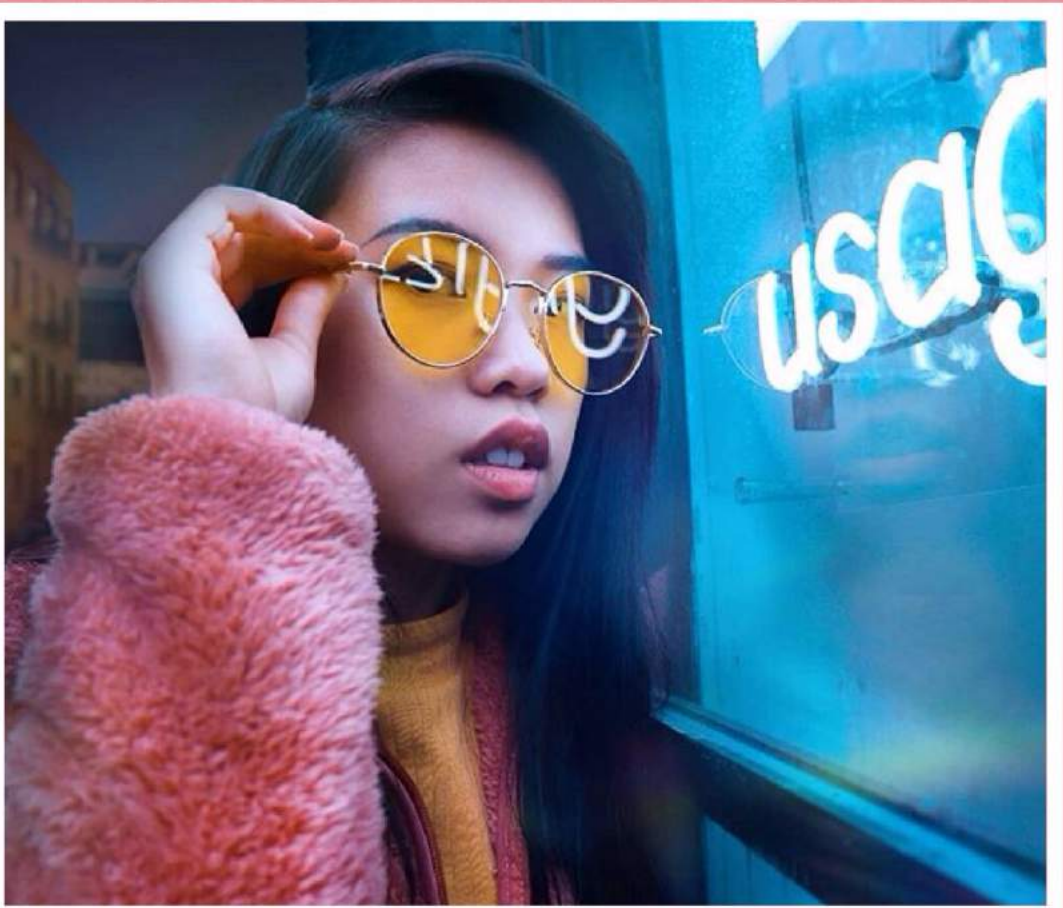
In the end, Threading Twine wants to create a team of close knit youth that can prove to the world that youth are working extremely hard towards a brighter tomorrow, and that we have impactful and educated voices that we will use to change the world and promote equality.

Bronna: What sorts of events/projects can you see coming from Threading Twine in the future?

Aarushi: We are extremely excited for 2018! We have many projects and interviews we are working on in order to improve in our marketing (especially on social media) and financing. Additionally, planning our 2018 monthly webinars has been extremely exciting, and we can't wait to see these webinars impact youth all over the world. Also, we just introduced our staff creators program in which a special team of youth are under direct guidance and mentorship from our Director of Content, Olivia, and me to create biweekly content for the platform. We hope to have lots more to come, including a highly involved and large ambassador team!

Please feel free to email us at info@threadingtwine.org to ask for more information- our largest goal is to get as many youth involved as possible to spread the mission of Threading Twine, become extraordinary activists, and change the world.

@MA.TCHAMILK



DEVELOPER SPOTLIGHT TRACY MA

Bronna: Tracy, it's so nice to be able to highlight your extraordinary abilities. When I met you at Kode with Klossy, you amazed me with your determination and understanding of code. You still inspire me to this day. You got into NYU girl! That's amazing! How has your time been there so far?

Tracy: Aw, thank you so much! In all honesty, it's been rather difficult for me to adjust to the college pace. In high school, my daily routine felt very structured—attend classes for half the day and then do homework for the remaining half—but in college, my schedule varies from day to day and class times are a lot shorter. This lack of a rigidly structured routine and the large amount of “free” time that I have makes me much more inclined to procrastinate, and often leaves me struggling to meet my deadlines—despite having been given several days to complete them. College life is disorienting because with so much free time, it can feel as much like a vacation as it does an education. Although I'm still struggling a bit due to time management, I'm sure that once I fall into the “college rhythm,” my life here will be nothing less than enjoyable!

Bronna: You developed your own app titled, “Boba! - Absorb Them All,” over the summer. You dropped it on August 24, and it was a clear hit. What was the process of creating this application like?

Tracy: Believe it or not, I actually find the initial brainstorming process to be one of the most integral components of developing a successful app. I knew I wanted to create a food-related game app, so one of my first steps was to research what popular food apps and games already existed, and to determine what made them so popular. I discovered that the most popular games were extremely easy to pick up—based on single or repetitive core mechanics—but challenging to master, such that the player would keep coming back for more. I eventually came across popular “simple” games such as ‘Tape it Up’ and ‘agar.io,’ and drew from them the mechanics and rules that I wanted my game to have: a simple swiping motion, and a point value based on the player's growth or size. Surprisingly, it still took me a while after of all this research to arrive at the “boba” idea. I initially considered other foods such as sushi, tea, and candy, before I arrived at the simple round shape of a boba ball (which came to me as I was drinking boba milk tea)!

The coding of the game itself came more intuitively. Once I incorporated the core mechanics—swiping left and right to move, and touching another object to get points—the other “refining” details, such as the “scrolling” world and random boba generation, intrinsically came afterwards. Naturally, art almost always should come last in this process. I am by no means a professional artist, but luckily I had enough experience in Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator to create all the art for my game myself. Finally, once I had a complete, functioning app, I began to explore the ways I could enhance the user experience: a main menu, scoreboard, collectibles, and changing scenery. But because these were not necessary for the game to function, some were incorporated in new updates. For instance, although my app's initial release included a main menu, scoreboard, and a single scene change, it was not until the next few updates that I incorporated a second scene change and an option for collectibles on the main menu. What I ultimately have come to recognize is that truly successful apps never stop growing; their developers are constantly trying to find ways to improve the user experience. So although my app being published to the app store may have in some ways signified a finished product, I don't believe I will ever truly feel as if I am “done” developing it.

Bronna: What kind of applications do you see yourself building in the future? Do you have any future projects that you can talk about?

Tracy: Now that I have experience in building a gaming app, I would really like to try to build a non-gaming app. However, with so many amazing apps already out in the market, it may be a while before I come up with a unique idea to execute! In the meantime, I am devoting much of my time to another passion of mine: video editing. In my application video for Kode With Klossy a few years ago, I mentioned wanting to combine my interest in video editing with my interest in coding, and I still intend to do so, somehow! Now that I'm thinking about it, it may be interesting to create an application that can make editing easier for me, and perhaps even for others. My editing process frequently features the use of Adobe After Effects, which includes a script editor based in JavaScript, so I know it is entirely possible to connect the two. I'm not entirely sure how it works yet, but I'm sure I'll figure it out someday! If you want to see some of the videos I've produced recently, be sure to check out my Youtube channel: CosmilkTea!

Bronna: What words of wisdom do you have for women who want to code, but don't know where to start?

Tracy: I would say try to find and make use of as many online resources as possible. Sites like Codecademy and Khan Academy are great because they teach you how to code for free, and don't require any special commitments. So if your high school doesn't offer computer science (mine didn't), you can still easily learn to code in your own time! If you are prepared to make some sort of commitment, summer camps like Kode with Klossy and Make School—the 8 week program that helped me gain the skills to develop “Boba - Absorb Them All!”—are great options. These programs help you to apply the knowledge you've learned to develop your own product—something that online coding sites do not typically offer. But most importantly, when learning to code, definitely try to think about and explore what aspects of coding interest you most, because in today's increasingly technological world, computer science intersects with many other fields, whether it be finance, media, or even food. If you are able to narrow down what parts of coding you want to be adept in, finding resources to help you get started will also be made easier.



Bronna: Rachael, I'm going to start by saying that you're a force to be reckoned with. As I sit on my bed in my dorm room, scrolling through social media, I'm always astonished to see what you're doing. You've accomplished so much at such a young age. How has this year been for you so far?

Rachael: This year has been an absolute whirlwind! Let me start off by thanking you. You inspire me everyday with your positivity and hard work. I honestly cannot express the amount of love and admiration I have for you.

This past year I've been all over the place!

From graduating high school a year early, to Kode with Klossy SHEcago, photoshoots and runways... it's been crazy! But in the best way possible.

Bronna: Congratulations on graduating a year early! You worked so hard to graduate high school as a junior, and you made it happen. I'm so proud of you. How did it feel to walk across that stage and receive your diploma?

Rachael: Freeing. All the late nights and extra classes paid off! Now I have the time to go after what I'm truly interested in.

Bronna: You've been incredibly busy since graduation. Your schedule is packed tight with constant photoshoots. How has your modeling journey been so far?

Rachael: Spontaneous, thrilling, exhausting, incredible. I feel like I'm all over the place all the time! The fashion industry can be crazy, but I love it!

Bronna: I heard that you were recently signed with a modeling agency! Congrats on being signed, first off. Anti sounds like an amazing agency. Can you tell me how you got signed and how it's been since then?

Rachael: I was headed to NYC to meet with Boy Meets Girl so I submitted to agencies again to try and set up some meetings. After meeting with Anti I fell in love, and fortunately they loved me too! Their team has been amazing in guiding me through the start of my career. They care about you not only as just one of their models, but as a person. Also, our board is full of such a diverse group of models from all backgrounds! I love Anti's approach to the fashion industry. You can read more about their vision on Anti's website. (<https://antimgt.com/>)







Bronna: You've also had the opportunity to become a brand ambassador for Boy Meets Girl. How did that come about? What is it like being an ambassador for a brand that has a platform for a social justice issue that you feel so strongly about?

Rachael: It has been a dream come true! Boy meets Girl is such an amazing brand. I connected with them first over social media, and things just took off from there! It feels great to rock all their amazing street style. Not only is it super cute and some of the comfiest clothing I own, but the company supports so many amazing causes! From anti-bullying campaigns to cancer research and everything in between! I honestly don't know how they do it all, but I'm proud to be a part of it in any way I can.

Bronna: Now, with all of your modeling, you still somehow found the time to head down to Chicago for two weeks during the summer for Kode with Klossy level two! How was that? Tell me everything!

Rachael: Kode With Klossy isn't just a class, it's an incredible experience. First off, the curriculum. I LOVE how every time you were taught something new, you were then given time to explore it on your own and ask questions to further your understanding. It's a class really set up to be sure you are comprehending the concepts and mastering skills, in contrast to how a lot of traditional schools can focus purely on memorizing information purely for the purpose of passing standardized tests.

But it's really the people who make the program!

The teachers, and your fellow classmates create such a supportive, positive environment for learning to code, and make sure you have fun doing it!

Bronna: You've definitely put your coding skills to use since Kode with Klossy level one. What have your skills been up to lately? I heard you've been creating websites for local businesses in your hometown.

Rachael: I've done some work in social media management for local businesses, and that naturally progressed into me also working on their websites! This is certainly something I couldn't have done without KWK, my high school didn't even offer coding classes.

Bronna: With all of the body positivity platforms coming up in the world as of late, tell me your views on it. How has body positivity been such a hard concept to understand whilst being in the modeling world?



Rachael: Personally, I don't think that understanding the concept is what's hard. I believe people struggle with putting it into practice, even more so when it comes to being body positive with themselves. I truly believe everyone is beautiful in their own unique ways, regardless of shape or size as long as they are healthy and taking care of themselves both physically and mentally. Slim is beautiful, curvy is beautiful, but people can go too far either way and become unhealthy. Being underweight is just as unhealthy as being obese. Every body is different, and that's what defines your unique beauty! One of my favorite quotes from my good friend, the personal trainer Justin Gelband, is "Be the best you can be, with the body that you've been given". Be kind to yourself. Recognize that you can be your best self, just as someone else can be their best self, and while you're both completely different you're both beautiful!

Bronna: Something else that you're passionate about, as previously mentioned, is coding. How have you seen the world of fashion and tech being mixed to create original ideas? Is this mixed industry something you'd see yourself being a part of?

Rachael: The most obvious is the rise of online shopping and social media. Trends rise and fall at astonishing rates. You don't have to wait for physical newspapers and magazines to tell you what's in, you either check online editions instantly or catch up on your favorite trend setter's social media! Likewise consumers have access to more stores, more items, and just overall more choices. Fashion has always been fast-paced but now it's flying by at supersonic speeds! I honestly think tons of original ideas have always existed, but now thanks to the internet they have the ability to get out there and be seen by way more people. Plus, technology has increased the opportunity for collaboration between people, even on opposite sides of the planet! This constantly changing industry excites me, and I can't wait to see where tech and fashion take me in the future.

Bronna: What is one app you would like to create?

Rachael: There is always a need for more mental health resources. I would love to build an app to inform people about different mental illnesses and the treatments available for them. In addition I would like to build a platform to connect patients with caretakers and treatment centers. There are a lot of people who need help but have no idea where to even begin to look for it! I would love an app to bridge that gap between the people who need help and the people that can help them.





Bronna: What are your plans for the newest season of NYFW coming up this spring? What kind of shows can we see you at?

Rachael: You'll just have to wait and see! All I can say is I'm excited to be back on the runway!

Bronna: Where do you want to ultimately end up when you visualize your dream career?

Rachael: Now that's a hard question. There are so many paths my life could take, and all of them are entirely impossible to predict. I've wanted to live in NYC since I was little and visited the city for the first time, so that is one thing I do know for sure. I dream to be happy and to have a platform to speak my mind about causes important to me, such as feminism and mental health. Other than that I'm completely open to wherever life takes me!

Bronna: Last question! What words of advice do you have for future models and coders of all ages, sizes, and identities?

Rachael: Stay true to yourself. Don't get caught up trying to follow the exact footsteps of a role model or celebrity. They got where they are in their own way, and you will find yours! Also, you're going to hear a lot of "no" from people before you ever hear a "yes". But never give up! Pursue what you're passionate about and don't listen to anyone who tells you not to for whatever reason.

And I'll say it again. Stay true to yourself. The fact that everyone is unique is such an incredible, beautiful thing. It's time we embrace it instead of attempting to fit into a mold.





TREMORS

WRITTEN BY: JACKY BETHEA

Tremors: How I Found My Voice in the Midst of Adversity

By: Jacky Bethea

One moment of my life I will never forget happened when I was about nine or ten years old. I was walking through a shopping mall beside my dad, Christmas shopping, when we were approached by this friendly-looking man. My dad and him started chatting- apparently, he was one of my father's coworkers. They were having a nice conversation but then my dad turned to me to introduce myself... and I froze (and when I say I froze, I mean I stood there in my petite-sized Kohl's khakis with my mouth wide open, body shaking like a chihuahua, and said nothing). Luckily my dad stepped in – he always has the right joke on hand to diffuse an awkward situation – and as I watched my father's coworker walk away, I remember my dad putting his hand on my shoulder with a concerned look on his face and asking me, “Jack, what happened? Are you afraid to speak up?”

I dismissed it then, but looking back, I realize that in that moment, my dad was doing the thing that he does best – seeing right through me. Growing up, I was afraid of my own voice. That's not to say that my fear always manifested itself in not being able to say simple things such as a self-introduction. No, my fear of my voice came in to play at the times when I may have needed it the most. I needed my voice when those bullies came around, making fun of my black skin and kinky hair. I needed it the time that a teacher assumed I had cheated on a paper because I had written as well as my white classmates. I needed my voice when every year seemed to get worse and worse until all of the alienation and turmoil came to a head and ensnared me into the deepest sadness I've ever known. Every time, a threat came around, I'd swallow my words, and let out an unsettling shiver. Maybe I'll say something next time. I had bottled up all of my words and I could feel them tearing me apart. I had this deep need to release everything I had been keeping in but I was so scared. What if no one understood? No one ever seemed to care before, why would they care now? What impact could I possibly make?

I didn't know it then but what I needed was a catalyst – and in my junior year of high school, that catalyst hit me. It was around February that it all started. An Instagram account with an innocent-sounding name popped on to my feed, but I never would have expected exactly what it would have to hold for me:

“Let's Remove all Black Students from our school! Is this really the kind of community we want?”

Page after page of racist sentiments filled my sight. Someone from my school had anonymously created this account solely to intimidate me, to scare me, to silence me. It



was personal; I could tell from the way they heartily advocated such separation, the way they would just keep going when I thought that maybe, just maybe they might be finished, and the way they plastered my face up on the wall for ridicule. Someone wanted me to see this and make me think that what they were, I would never be. That message rung clear as day. It was as clear as the words I overheard and the things that had been done, for so, so, long... and for the first time in my life, I didn't bottle it. I couldn't even get sad. No, I felt angry.

Everything I had held in and let fester, came undone. I had this burst of energy to tear the shackles I had built, and I prepared myself to lay bare what I had wanted to say all of this time.

I wrote a poem, three pages, double-spaced. In it, I laid bare everything: my fears, my hopes, my fury, my weariness. I detailed my struggle and the years I spent trivializing what was seriously harming me and I made it clear that no one will harm me again.

Then, when my emotions had submitted to the pages, I read them all aloud to my entire school at a talent show. My voice was unyielding, emotional and strong. I'll never forget that day because I felt like I was telling the Earth that it couldn't keep me planted. I was taking a mighty stomp on the roots of hurt and hate that tried to penetrate me. I felt like I was telling the stars that I'd touch them yet.

I got a standing ovation from all of my peers when I had finished. I could see my teachers and friends with tear stains on their faces that matched my own. It took a while for me to even acknowledge that somewhere among the crowd was the person who tried to take my voice once and for all, but somehow it didn't even matter. I had spoken up and when I did, the ground shook below me; I knew I would never silence my heart again.

So these days, I carry on. I still get hurt, but when I do, I speak. In these trying times, when justice may falter, I hope that you, too, won't silence yourself. Let your voice be heard when the odds point against you, put your faith in the gift you have been given. Speak up, and maybe, if you pay close attention, you'll feel the ground below you tremor...



PHILLIP PICARDI

Phillip Picardi, Chief Content Officer of them. & Digital Director of Teen Vogue, chats with Bronna to get behind the scenes of the life at Condé Nast.



Bronna: You developed your own individualized major Beauty at NYU focusing around the aesthetic of beauty, journalism, and art history. I found that incredibly inspiring. How did you cultivate that major?

Phillip: I didn't necessarily land on the concentration being called Beauty until I was well into my sophomore year. I took a class called, Bodily Fiction, that was largely about how women [along with queer people and people of color] are portrayed in the media. [Also] how advertising and fashion helped to kind of further polarize and create stereotypes of certain people. I also took a theatre class called, The Art of Play, where we focused on basically child's play, and what was inspiring and how you can get inspired by getting into a child's mindset. So, I think that the key thing that I learned from Gallatin was that multi-disciplinary kind of approaches and interests can lead to a really well rounded education. It was a very untraditional education of course, but I feel like it has really well served [myself] in an environment and climate that's constantly changing so fast.

Bronna: Wow, that's quite the resume. You've held numerous editorial positions—ranging from *Refinery29* and *Allure* to *them*.—and when you joined your recent position at *Teen Vogue* just a couple of years ago, you boosted the monthly viewing ratings from 2 million to 12 million in just 2 years. That's phenomenal. I know that yourself and Elaine Welteroth did that together, but what role did you play in it and how did you develop those ratings?

Phillip: I was involved in digital and Elaine was at the helm of print. So the digital growth was the strategy that I had built from since I had started as the digital editorial director three years ago. I had felt like *Teen Vogue* had a lot of white space in its coverage. So why weren't we covering careers outside of the fashion industry? Why didn't we cover sexual health? Why didn't we talk about drugs [or alcohol]? Of course our claim to fame is now politics. So why didn't we talk about politics and the upcoming election? So we started covering all of those things. [Due to] the nature of covering such a range of content, we gave more permission to our audience that they could be interested in whatever hit the runway at the *Proenza* show and also whatever Donald Trump was saying in the midterm debates with Hillary Clinton. There was overlap in those interests and we shouldn't discredit young women for being interested in fashion and beauty. We can take fashion and beauty seriously, and we can also have fun with it. You can do the same things with politics. That seemed like common sense to everyone who worked here. To the rest of the world it still seems like a revolutionary thought.

Bronna: You really listen to your audiences. While at the Kode with Klossy panel hosted by Calvin Klein and Amazon, you mentioned that it's imperative for us to listen to young audiences. Why is that so important to you?

Phillip: Well, I think that the way magazines have traditionally been run before is that you have a group of editors who go to shows and live a rarified world that's pretty exclusive. Then they kind of bottle up this element of exclusivity in this red velvet rope of access and privilege. Then they package it in a glossy publication that people read. I really don't think that young people want to do that. We saw with the advance of *Youtube* that *Teen Vogue* lost its foothold in its influence. What helped was the outreach of listening to our viewers and respecting their points of view, and engaging with them and talking back to them when they talked to you.

Bronna: That's so important, so thank you. You aided in giving us the ability to use our voice for change. Last question for you! What advice can you give to others who dream of being such a force in the beauty and fashion industry such as yourself? Is it now enough to hold the job that you were hired for, or is it your new responsibility to also be an advocate?

Phillip: You have to be patient with yourself. That's first and foremost. You can't change the world as an assistant, per say. You do have to earn respect, keep your head down, and do the good work. I wasn't effecting change at *Teen Vogue* with my prior positions, because I wasn't in a position of privilege to do so. When I was called back to this role, I was able to more effect the decisions that were made at a leadership level and be respected. You have to earn respect. That is just the way that jobs work. But once you get here, once you're sitting in an office and you are hiring people, it is your responsibility to effect change in your workplace. I have been very intentional about diversifying our newsroom. As a cis-gender man, I am so removed from a teenage girl's experience. While I may be sympathetic to all of the causes that we talk about, and in some cases personally affected by the causes that we talk about, I trust that my editors know these things from their lived experiences better than I ever could. I may be an agent of change and making certain things happen, but they're the ones who are directly relating to our readers and being those readers role models. You do have to pass the mic along once you're in a position of power, and you also have to allow yourself to be critiqued and allow for change on that level. Not all of it is an easy lesson, but every day is a brand new learning experience. I think that the desire and hunger to learn and keep an open mind will serve you well.

Meredith Talusan



Meredith Talusan, Senior Editor of them. and professional writer for numerous media outlets, gives Bronna the inside scoop on what they're bringing to the new Condé Nast platform.

Bronna: After reading your article, *When a Father's Son Becomes His Daughter*, I really wanted to know what the culture shock was like when you moved from the Philippines to California when you were just fifteen years old.

Meredith: First of all, I was devout Catholic at the time. I was living in a rural area in the Philippines, going to Catholic school, [wearing] uniforms, and we had strict nuns running the school. Then it was just a culture shock from top to bottom. You would see kids kissing in the hall at school and the girls wearing sleeveless clothes. I think I spent my first year in America, like, basically hiding under my desk.

[During] my junior year in high school I was in math and science, and so I actually ended up going to high school just in the morning, then going to college in the afternoons and evenings. Then I was in the cafeteria and doing my math homework, and this girl Diana—[who] is still one of my best friends— was 19 and I was 15, and [she] came up to me, and was just like, “you look like you know what you're doing.” [After that], she said, “if you teach me in math, I'll teach you in life,” which was really great, so I said, “yes.” So, that was basically how I learned to be cool. I got to adjust to America with my one friend, Diana, who took me under her wing.

Bronna: That must've been an insane experience. So while attending college that early, then also attending three incredibly prestigious schools—Harvard, California College of the Arts, and Cornell—how did all of that prepare you for your life path at *Vice*, *BuzzFeed*, and now *them*?

Meredith: I think I have just always been really passionate about learning. I've always been a really curious person, and if I'm curious about something, I just have this really strong need to learn everything I can about it. I feel like that curiosity just translates, so for me it has never been about, you know, getting to an accomplishment. I get to put out work that I'm really proud of about a community that I'm really committed to. I hope that I'm making an impact. I think that [my education] has given me all the tools that I need to put out the best work that I can.

Bronna: It definitely has. Okay, so onto a tougher question. With Trump as our president, where Dreamers and LGBTQ+A individuals are fearful for their rights, what words of encouragement do you have for any one of them?

Meredith: Find your forms of resistance. Find good ways for you to fight for your principles, your philosophy, and your dignity. The work that I do I think is a form of resistance, but also [there are] things like volunteering for key advocacy groups. It's a big help, of course.

Bronna: Alrighty, thank you so much for your time. This is my last question for you: what words of advice can you offer to those reading who are struggling with their own gender identity?

First of all, gender is a process. I know that it's important for them not to be too hard on themselves. People go through parts of their lives where they feel like they have figured things out, and then other parts of their lives where they feel like they haven't. That's completely okay. It's better to actually live with that uncertainty, than make a decision that you're not actually sure of just for the sake of making one. Of course it really helps to have as many forms of support. Hopefully, you know, they'll reach out to the *them*. community.

Guilt.rb

narrative.by: (Bronna.Adkins)

I'll find myself lounging on my dorm room bed, typing out articles for each magazine spread, and suddenly a jolt hits me. It's familiar, and I try to shrug it off like it doesn't matter, but it does. It always matters. I'll type another sentence and focus further on the screen in direct view, but a voice whispers in my head.

Why aren't you typing out code?

I gulp as the voice calls me out in the way it knows best, but I shake my head. I know why I'm not. I am aware of my decisions and why I've chosen this life that's ahead of me, but the small internal machine of guilt likes to spew out words that suggests otherwise.

When I attended Kode with Klossy, I'd never felt safer. I felt empowered, encouraged, and pushed. I leapt off the cliff of comfort zones and shoved myself into the deep waters of HTML, CSS, and Ruby—but I wasn't scared. I had my girls with me.

I learned how to critically think, learn, and communicate. I learned more in two weeks than I ever had in my entire life. I couldn't help but think *maybe this is the path for me*. Along those two weeks, I tried my hardest to fall in love with code deeper than I had fallen in love with writing, but my heart wasn't there. My soul pulled on my ear and shout out, "Pretty Smart!"

Coding, although an extreme challenge I loved to develop skills over, just wasn't my niche. Photographing body positive models, attending New York Fashion Week, visiting Condé Nast offices—now **that** was up my alley. I felt content in that world, but my angry, internalized guilt machine wanted me to think otherwise.

As I chose my school, major, and life plan at the end of my senior year of high school, I noticed how many Klossy women were deciding on computer science majors. As I congratulated them with copious amounts of emojis and praise on social media platforms, because I was so proud of my fellow ladies, I also felt like I was letting them down.

I felt my stomach plummet to the floor with the thought of letting my girls down. My eyes welled up with tears at the thought of bringing disappointment to those who believed in me.

Women support other women.

I follow those words and let them guide my actions. I remind myself daily that my fellow women need to be supported in all that they do, and that responsibility is something that I do my best to uphold. But my guilt made me feel like my heart had the wrong path laid out for myself. What I soon realized was that I wasn't supporting myself one bit.

As women, it's our duty to stand up for the women in our life who feel like their voice isn't loud enough. Often times we forget that that means us as well. It's not selfish to go after our dreams or our correct life paths. I know I love fashion, body positivity, and writing, but that doesn't mean I can't be a STEM girl as well.

Coding is something I love. Everyone from Kode with Klossy falls in love with the language of the internet, but it doesn't mean that we have to dedicate our lives to our computers. We should encourage one another and other women to pursue occupations in STEM fields, yes. It doesn't mean, however, that we have to shame ourselves if we don't think it's the right fit for our lives.

I know now that I don't have to feel guilty for following my dreams. My fellow women and Kode with Klossy girls want me to succeed just as much as I want them to. I don't need to carry anymore needless guilt. I know my plan is for me, and I'm proud of my choices. I know myself, what I want, and what impact I want to make on this world; I can do that within both of my worlds.

So whenever it starts creeping back in, I decide to check out what other women are doing in the tech world, and I plan out how to support them in their endeavors.

Women support other women.

SOCIAL *Media*

Instagram: @prettysmartmag

Facebook: @prettysmartmagazine

Twitter: @prettysmartmag

Scan for website



Scan for app



THANK YOU

to the amazing...

Elysha Ang

Rachael Pope

Sofia Ongele

**Phillip
Picardi**

**Tracy Ma,
Threading Twine,
Kode with Klossy**

**Meredith
Talusán**

Pace University

My readers, for motivating and inspiring me