

PRETTY

smart

FEATURING

FRANCESCA

Curran

ORANGE IS THE
NEW BLACK
ACTRESS



LET'S TALK ABOUT

**MENTAL
HEALTH**



Welcome

TO THE OCTOBER 2017 ISSUE OF

PRETTY
smart

MAGAZINE



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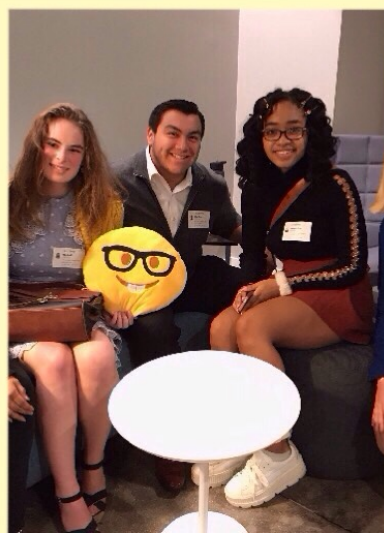
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FROM THE

Editor



Dear Readers,

Happy Halloween!

I've been so pumped to share this issue with all of you for weeks now. After I met Francesca at New York Fashion Week, I knew I needed her on the front page of *Pretty Smart*. I'm so beyond blessed that she decided to take a chance on a young girl with billboard-sized dreams.

This past month was filled with many breath taking experiences. I got to visit Refinery29, BuzzFeed, see DNCE in concert, meet Joe Jonas and Ryan Quinn from *The Voice*, and do a photoshoot with someone I truly admire. If there's one thing I advise you all on, it's this: network every situation you can in life. It takes you to crazy heights of success.

This issue I wanted to make something truly special for my readers, so I'm overjoyed to introduce you to one of my favorite actresses from the hit Netflix show, *Orange is the New Black*. This boss woman is talented, hard working, and amazingly passionate about everything she does—and wears. Get ready to hear all about her crazy-awesome life!

I wish you the happiest Halloween ever. You're my favorite people in the entire world. Have a great day and I hope you love this issue.

So much love,

Bronna

MEET THE LOVELY

Francesca
Curran

IN THIS
ISSUE

A QUOTE

FROM

THE VOICE CONTESTANT

RYAN
QUINN

Bronna: On your journey through the voice, you really put yourself out there. You went there and you worked your butt off. How often did you have to work on your music for the battle rounds and live shows while on The Voice?

Ryan Quinn: We had scheduled rehearsal times with behind the scenes vocal coaches with the band and everything. But, it's a daily thing. You're preparing for such a short amount of time, so I took it really seriously. I definitely worked every single day. Even if you were stuck with a song you didn't know or love—I was lucky, because I knew mine—you could completely rearrange the song however you want to, so I did that.

Brianna: Do you have any advice to any aspiring young artists who want to pursue music?

Ryan Quinn: If you want to pursue anything really, especially the arts, take it really seriously. Have fun obviously, because that's what it's all about, but take it as seriously as you can stomach. Devote as much time as you possibly can into the craft. Also, I've known people that this has happened to, so I feel very strongly about it: don't let anybody—parents, your friends, an uncle, whatever—tell you that pursuing music, or whatever your passion is, isn't worthwhile. It's really easy to let other people sway your decisions and tell you it's not a good idea. Screw them.

Donald & Audrey Student L

Donald & Audrey Student L

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HANNAH KATINSKY

Bronna: What Halloween costume has by far been the best you've worn? Why did you choose it?

Hannah: I think that the best Halloween costume I have worn to date has got to be my senior year of highschool when my friends and I went as a soccer family. We chose to do the group costume, because we have a running joke that my friend, Phoebe, is a soccer mom (with the fully loaded SUV that is ready for anything). So my friend Jenny and I were her kids, then we had our "coach dad" and our stereotypical "grandpa" that goes to every game looking like he's going on a tropical vacation.

Bronna: You're a thespian, so that comes in handy when transforming into a character for Halloween. Can you tell me a little bit about how your theatrical past has helped you out during October?

Hannah: Getting into character has always been something I like to experiment with, so I guess you might say that my theatrical past helps me feel comfortable experimenting with new and unusual costumes.

Bronna: Which badass female characters do you want to see people wearing costumes for this Halloween?

Hannah: I really hope to see a lot of girls as Debbie from Baby Driver this year. Maybe some as Veronica or Peggy Carter. Hopefully we'll also see Wonder woman as well as Black widow, Scarlett Witch and Gamora!

Bronna: What cliché halloween costume do you secretly love?

Hannah: Hands down, the witch. I regret to confess I went as a witch 4 years in a row!

Bronna: If you could make any costume in the world, and you had an unlimited budget, what would you make?

Hannah: I don't know If I would make it, because I have no skills when it comes to sewing, but if I had an unlimited budget I would either round up enough people for the entire cast of Riverdale and be Cheryl, or do the cast of Baby Driver and be Debbie.



Francesca Curran

INTERVIEWED BY: BRIANNA ADKINS

BOLD IS
THE NEW
BEAUTIFUL





As I sat in the back row for my very first fashion show of New York Fashion Week, a certain brilliant blonde entered my vision. Her perfectly pink outfit, complete with glitter boots and a beret, caught my eye in a flash.

"I know her," I whispered to my friend, Jacky, then went to Google to confirm my theory. "I knew it!"

I beamed in victory as I knew that my thought was confirmed. This was the very first time that I saw the beautiful Francesca Curran with my own two eyes. I knew her from my laptop screen when I watched her perform as Skinhead Helen on the hit Netflix series, *Orange is the New Black*, but suddenly she was right before me.

After the show, I ran up to her and became acquainted with the incredibly elegant and radiant woman that I'm happy to consider one of my friends. She agreed to be apart of *Pretty Smart*, because she loved the message of this positive magazine, and the rest is history.

Without further ado, here is by far the most amazing cover girl I've ever had the chance to interview. Meet the kick-a** boss girl, impeccable actress, and inspiring woman that you need to know. Here's Francesca Curran!





Bronna: Francesca, it's amazing to see you again. Last time I saw you, I met you for the very first time during New York Fashion Week. How was your NYFW experience?

Francesca: Hi! It's so nice to see you again! Yes, we met on the street of Fashion Week- that's a really great meet-cute. My NYFW experience was a blast- fun, interesting, and insanely busy! I saw, like, 42 shows in eight or nine days. It was my first NYFW, so my mind was blown. I had dreamed about going to NYFW since I was only as tall as my knee-high boots, so for me this was a "check it off the bucket list" moment. I saw so many up and coming designers spreading their wings, and it really opened my mind to how fashion has evolved as of recently, and let me say, I'm pretty excited about the future of fashion.

Bronna: You have an incredibly unique and bold style, which I absolutely love. It's definitely far from what your characters wear in your shows. How did you develop your style sense?

Francesca: Thank you so much! That's one of the highest compliments I think you can pay someone. I think it's really interesting and quite frankly fascinating how much what we have on has the ability to sway our confidence all over the spectrum. I am a huge believer in "look good, feel good." And when I say "look good," I mean in the eyes of the one wearing it, because that's genuinely all that matters. I remember being in junior high and high school and people saying to me "this is just a phase you'll grow out of." I actually was sat down by my principal at my private school. She said to me: "you know we support you in your individuality, but you can't pile up jewelry and wear those crazy knee-high socks with your uniform." I had knock-off Chanel pearls hanging down onto my polo, and I blinged-out my conservative crew neck sweater with flashy pins and jewels. The other girls didn't wear a stitch of makeup and I was up at five in the morning contouring and blending before [it] was even a thing. I looked at the principal and politely said "So, you don't actually support my individuality." She knew it was a battle not worth fighting. She told me to tone it down. Did I? Never! Sometimes I dress like I came alive from a Jeremy Scott advertisement. My personal style is the love child of Moschino, Gucci, Dolce and Gabbana summer collection, and sprinkled with glitter and fairy dust.

Bronna: You have to shave your head and endure hours of makeup daily in order to play your character on *Orange Is the New Black*, which is crazy. I know losing your hair can be a sensitive subject, but did it empower you or distress you when you got it chopped off? How did you view your body while playing Helen versus being yourself in public life?

Francesca: I so appreciate your sensitivity to the narrative, but actually, I'm super open about it. I am strangely unfazed by the whole ordeal. I was mentally prepared to be heartbroken every time I looked in the mirror, but actually when I see my reflection I feel a wave of pride come over me. I feel totally empowered as a woman. Body wise, I've never felt such a strong contrast in who I am when I am playing Helen versus myself. It's alarming to even see myself on camera and realize that that's actually me. Because of the circumstances of the character, the role is so physically motivated and how I stand, move, and interact with other characters stems from how I plant myself physically. I go through a process every morning on set in transforming myself and shedding my skin as Francesca. It includes a lot of movement, listening to music, and hype-up. It is a great challenge to accept my body during the time we shoot the show. When I was first offered the role of Helen, I made the choice to gain weight and muscle. The breakdown specifically said Helen was supposed to be "broad, physically intimidating; demands the room when she walks into it." I distinctly remember the first time my head was shaved, all of my tattoos were applied and I put on the white muscle tee and elastic beige prison pants. I stepped into the hallway where the dressing rooms were and Samira (Poussey) went "woahhhh." Her eyes got huge as she stared at me. That's when the lightbulb went off for me. It's a part of the process, and I feel it to be extremely effective in informing the character's choices. I love my body. I love that I'm curvy. Helen's body is not mine. I mean, technically it is. There are no prosthetics, additions, or omissions, for that matter. The way that I carry myself as Helen is one



"You are more than you think you are. You are brave, intelligent, honest, capable, kind, beautiful, and you are uniquely you. Never let anyone else tell you otherwise. If they do, get rid of them from your life."

- Francesca Curran

hundred percent different than how I carry myself as Francesca. Watching the show, i've seen scenes where i'm like "thats....not...me...right?" but when you're playing a character, (especially a character like a buzzed-head, "physically arresting" white supremacist) all vanity has to be left behind. Looking attractive or well poised doesn't serve the message of the show or portrayal of my character in any way, shape, or form. I love watching movies where beautiful actors have messed up teeth, or not-covered acne, wrinkles, scars, or a not perfectly plucked brow. THAT, to me, is a million times more interesting and real than a meticulous face. We want to see real people and their real stories. Knowing that, I say - this is my body, take it or leave it. Like it or not. This is me.

Bronna: Body positivity is a social movement very near and dear to my heart. Can I have your thoughts on it?

Francesca: Yes! I love that this is coming up more in conversation! It's very near and dear to my heart as well. I am at a point in my life where I feel very spiritually connected to the body positivity, self-love movement. I've always been healthily critical of my figure throughout my teenage years and until now, even. I'm working on the small accomplishments right now: stage one, accepting compliments. It's strange that we're taught that it's inappropriate to accept compliments from others without feeling guilty or deflecting. If someone says "you look so pretty today" why is it that so often we feel the need to say "ugh, no I don't. I haven't washed my hair in two days and my makeup didn't turn out." That's balderdash! We need to stop putting ourselves down in our mission to stop others in putting us down. I don't judge anyone for having body positivity issues, because sadly, we're unknowingly trained at a young age to accept a certain body as our standard of beauty. I think we have a lot of super intelligent and out-of-the-box thinking leaders in the movement who are helping to crack and destroy those stereotypes, so I have faith in what can be accomplished. I don't think there is a cookie-cutter way for how to treat this epidemic of body-shamers. I do believe that the journey begins with falling in love with yourself. Simple affirmations are a good starting place. Every day point something out to yourself that you love. It may seem so self-indulgent, but starting your morning with a good cup of coffee and a simple affirmation will instill you with at least 24 hours of confidence, and once that is in the atmosphere, it'll be contagious to others.

Bronna: Speaking of Skinhead Helen, you finished the fifth season of OITNB (congratulations!). Your character shows viewers the dynamics of racism within our world, through her Neo-Nazi title and white supremacist mindset. What's it like playing Helen in times where race is such a huge topic of discussion in the media?

Francesca: Yay! Thank you! I'm very proud of the fifth season. Season four was a little slice of an introduction to Helen, and then in season five I was given such meaty material - I was in heaven. I would be up in bed reading the scripts as they were sent to us, and finding out the content as I read - and I'd start screaming. My husband would come running from downstairs, like "what!? What's wrong?" and when he saw me reading the script, he'd be like "don't scare me like that!" He read along with me, and we screamed together. Yes, so Helen is a white supremacist and that's about the extent of background information we've see so far. It's super surreal to be playing a character that is being represented in current times. I have this discussion with friends and family often; I feel a certain responsibility to play this accurately and as backed by research as possible because I know the more effectively I can play Helen, the more educational for the viewers of the show. The OITNB family is heavily involved in activism, and I know that we all agree that such controversial characters serve a purpose in opening the eyes of viewers; essentially, popping the bubble of those shielded (knowingly or not) from the danger of white supremacism and Neo-Nazism. I think we've also started a narrative that is avoided largely by white people, which is, if nothing else, a good start. I don't mind being the bad guy if it means we're going to start and prolong a very needed conversation about time sensitive issues. I delved



Brilliant

into a never-ending pile of information in order to be as knowledgeable as possible before filming. I was shocked and overwhelmed by how accessible the information is in regards to joining a white supremacist or Neo-Nazi organization. I also realized I had hesitations in how deep I went into my research for reasons of safety. I paused, and realized that that's how their victims must feel. I dug deeper, and deeper. I think I owe it to the character. The topics made me uncomfortable but I think they helped me to submerge myself in Helen's beliefs. There is so much information available to us about these power groups - for this reason, I feel like we cannot plead ignorance anymore. These people are real, these issues are real, and if they're not faced head on, they're ticking time bombs in our society.

Bronna: Does playing Helen educate you more to help you understand why Black Lives Matter is such a huge movement in this day and age? Do you ever feel ashamed to play Helen?

Francesca: Playing Helen forced me to address my white privilege - I always thought that because I am informed and I participate in pro-BLM activism, that I was immune to the title "white privilege." Through having more thoughtful and open-minded discussions with my cast mates, I came to see that it is something that I have unconditionally in the fact that I am a white person. I am white, therefore I have privilege. I was raised very privileged, I am a white female, and I feel a strong pull to be a part of the movement and raise awareness in every way possible for the Black Lives Matter platform. My research made it alarmingly obvious that there is more focus on white deaths, less reporting on white crime, and black crimes are highlighted, with false headlines and unconfirmed—often imaginative—information. I have had moments where I've felt self conscious and nervous playing Helen, especially when I've had to say such harmful and strong things to my fellow cast mates, because it can feel so personal delivering hate speech. We always keep set a safe space, so I remind myself and others that I'm taking the words off the page, and the shame passes. I do feel shame for those who live hateful lives and who practice prejudice against others because of skin color, religion, or any other belief. I take my role very seriously in the sense that I have the opportunity and the platform to make others look in the mirror and evaluate their own prejudices.

Bronna: Why do you think Helen is such a crucial character in *Orange is the New Black*? How did you prepare to audition for Helen and how did you prepare to play her?

Francesca: I think Helen is a crucial character because she really exemplifies what I think a white supremacist is; she's a follower, not a leader. I say that because her acts of violence and the "put on" of being tough and untouchable are strictly informed by fear. We see tiny moments of potential redemption, especially in season five, which reminds us that even the biggest and most terrifying monsters have flickers of humanity underneath it all. I think she also "stirs the pot" and keeps the plot rolling and as of recent, keeps the humor light, which is hysterical. My preparation for the audition was as much as I could fit in to the small margin of time I had before. I got the call from my agent at 11pm that I had an audition the next morning at 7am. I rushed home after work and went over the script for the audition, and I got on the internet, read about white supremacy and Neo-Nazism culture, and looked at photos of skinheads until I practically fell asleep. There really was no turn-around time to dive any deeper. I woke up early, had my coffee, put on my ultra ripped jeans, a tight gray muscle tank, dirty construction boots, and I slicked my hair as tight to my head as possible with extra hold gel. I still have the photo of what I looked like right before the audition - I look at it from time to time to remind myself how much my life changed from that morning to about 48 hours afterwards. It can be a dark place to go to mentally sometimes, but it's a gift as an actor to be constantly challenged by the material.

Bronna: How has *Orange is the New Black* affected you personally? How did you react when you received the role?



Francesca: OITNB has changed my life substantially- a complete 180 degree flip. I was auditioning and dreaming of landing a breakout role like this - so as you can imagine, I was beside myself with emotion. Still to this day, years later, I have to pinch myself sometimes because it doesn't feel real. Especially because of the super fast turnaround of my auditioning and my first day on set, it was a whirlwind. I was working double shifts at Starbucks and the late shift at my family's restaurant as a waitress. Four or five days later, I was on set filming my first scene as Helen. We filmed the show for six months and I had to keep it a secret, so when it finally dropped and friends and acquaintances started to find out, it was very overwhelming. When I was in acting school at The American Musical and Dramatics Academy, this is exactly what I day dreamt about in class. For it to pan out like this is unreal. The show allowed me to play a challenging character as a breakout television role, and it's opened so many doors for me. I'll be forever grateful to it! My reaction to receiving the role was a lot of screaming. I was actually in the doctor's office waiting to be called into my appointment when my agent called me with the news. I ignored his call, and he left me a voicemail that still gives me goosebumps to this day - "pick up your phone, you got it!" I listen to it every now and then as a pick-me-up. It was such a beautiful moment.

Bronna: After becoming this character that's the total opposite of yourself, what kind of roles do you see yourself accepting in the future?

Francesca: This is something I think about very often. Helen is so opposite of who I am - I don't think it'd be possible to create a character any further from who I am as Francesca. I'm so glad I got to take on such a dramatic transformation role early on, because I think it'll encourage industry people to not pigeonhole me as just the tall blonde "girl next door," perhaps they'll see me in a more diverse manner. It would be a dream to have a career where I can go from playing a serial killer, to the quirky best friend on a comedy series, to a mysterious undercover agent, to an intelligent girl boss running a major company. I would love to play an action hero girl. I'm obsessed with stunts (spoiler alert!!!) ever since filming the season five raid. Most people don't know that I am actually primarily a comedienne, so I'd love the opportunity to play a funny leading lady on screen or on the stage. I love being a part of the Netflix family, and I'm obsessed with so many of the original series (cough cough Stranger Things, House of Cards, Narcos, etc.) so maybe down the line there'll be an interesting way to slide into the plot. I still have a craving to get on stage, Broadway has been on and will be on my bucket list until the end of time so I will not stop until I can check that off.

Bronna: If you could be the main character of any movie/show, whether it exists or not, what would it be?

Francesca: Ooooh, this is tough. I would die to play any character on The Office- I do not get sick of that show. The comedic timing and the brilliant writing and improvisation, I mean come on. I wish I could've played Khaleesi on Game Of Thrones. The character is so interesting, because she is soft and feminine oftentimes, but she switches into being a ruthless killer and the ruler of the kingdom. Also, she gets to be near Kit Harrington! No shame.

Bronna: I heard that you like creating backstories for your characters. If you could create a backstory for yourself, what would it be?

Francesca: I do, because I think having that information in my back pocket is essential to how real I can make Helen. Even though we don't know the full development of her story, I felt I had to fill in the gaps in order to "take her off the page". So, once upon a time there was a girl named Francesca that was born and raised in suburban Minnesota, outside of Minneapolis/St. Paul. She grew up in competitive dancing and fell in love with the stage. Her mom found a newspaper ad in their local paper for auditions for a regional theater company, and she went in at the age of eleven, and sang 32 bars of "Beautiful" by Christina Aguilera. Her mom and aunt were in the



waiting room when she came out and found out she had a callback - they were in shock - it was her very first audition. She booked the show and we went on to do almost 300 performances of it. She stayed with that company throughout her teenage years and did several professional shows, which is where they instilled professionalism and emotional toughness in her, and where all her skills were honed. She was so busy performing eight shows a week (including matinees), that she had to be pulled from school three to four days a week. When it came time to apply to colleges, she knew in her heart that the best option as an aspiring actress was to attend a conservatory in the heart of New York City- full immersion in the sights, smells, and action of the main hub of musical theater and in the core of the heart of acting. She applied to several liberal arts schools, interested to see the extent of her possibilities. She ultimately decided on a conservatory, AMDA. There, she studied for three years, honing her tools and cramming as much information as humanely possible! It was the three hardest and most rewarding years of her life. One night, walking in the city after class, she met her husband in Times Square. He stopped her and asked her for directions to a restaurant, and they started talking. After auditioning relentlessly and working several jobs to stay above water, she landed the breakout role of a lifetime - Skinhead Helen on *Orange Is The New Black*. The rest is history.

Bronna: Lately I noticed that you took a pledge against bullying by posting it on social media. I'm beyond ecstatic to see you partake in something as important as a pledge against bullying. What inspired you to take that vow?

Francesca: Thank you so much! That means a lot to me. I think that bullying is a very real issue and like many, something I've been personally victimized by. I know that a growing social media presence is a powerful platform to take a stance for important causes, and it's my responsibility as a potential influencer (to young women especially) to stand up and speak out against it. I wish that when I was young and morally pliable that more of the celebrities that I had idolized would have taken a vow against bullying - it may have influenced me to challenge the outlook of the "this is part of growing up" mentality. That's where we go wrong as a society - we've conditioned our younger generations to believe that bullying is a part of growing pains. I think it's crucial that we teach our future that bullying isn't a byproduct of popularity; instead it is a direct cause of suicide, depression, and other debilitating psychological conditions. I think as young and ignorant teenagers, it may seem harmless to spread rumors, to gossip, or to target a vulnerable peer in an effort to win the laughter of others, or to unknowingly gain self confidence. At the time, it seems totally innocent to mock or joke at the expense of another. What you don't see is that person feeling helpless, going home to perhaps a hostile home situation, and hitting rock bottom. It's also important that we get to the bottom of what bullies are; oftentimes their victims are in possession of a characteristic that they lack. It's a difficult concept to teach to a young person who is in the middle of the storm. I'm a self-proclaimed old soul - I just don't understand bringing people down to lift yourself up. Loving yourself is always a fruitful place to start- once you love yourself it's inevitable that you'll be receptive to love and less inclined to be judgmental. If you're being bullied, or if you can admit to yourself that you've been a bully, please reach out for help. Life is too valuable to throw away, and no matter how dark life may seem, there is always a light, and time can heal most wounds. For whoever needs to hear it, I love you. I'm sending strength to survivors, to victims, to bullies and to people all around the world who feel alone.

Bronna: Your social media is also filled with words of encouragement and motivation. Why do you believe it's so important to post your moving messages?

Francesca: I don't really cultivate my social media posts ahead of time because I want them to be organic and true to what I'm feeling at the time. I know some people that like to have pre-meditated posts and like to know their post will be well received by followers. I hope that mine are, but I'm not posting to gain a following or to maintain one. I post what I like and what I feel



in the hopes that my stories and photos are relatable and inspiring to aspiring young people. I am well aware that I am where I am in my career because I stayed positive and pushed through times when my determination was fading. Perseverance is key to success, but it's also very fleeting. Life happens, and it can be difficult to hang onto a dream when sometimes the dream seems too big to come to fruition. We are also a generation of instant gratification, so I know there are people out in the social media galaxy that are working jobs they don't like while they daydream about shooting for the stars (like me). Those are the people I want to connect with on my Instagram, and on my social media. I know that feeling of frustration, of yearning for an opportunity like the back of my hand. I think it's important to know that people who are living their dream went through the same rites of passage. I want people of all ages, ambitions, races, religions, beliefs, and origins to see my posts and to feel a fiery injection of self confidence; a boost of motivation. I know it's important to instill confidence, but if my photo or caption can provide a reminder, I'm happy to share my stories and innermost feelings.

Bronna: We're getting down to the end of the interview now. I just have one more question after this one. Your positive messages are so encouraging. Can you leave a message here for readers to see and read for themselves?

Francesca: You are more than you think you are. You are brave, intelligent, honest, capable, kind, beautiful, and you are uniquely you. Never let anyone else tell you otherwise. If they do, get rid of them from your life. Surround yourself with people who are your cheerleaders; who think the world of you. Treat them the same way. Foster giving friendships and practice the golden rule. Do something every day for you - no matter what it may be. Wake up in the morning and while you're brushing your teeth, think about something you like about yourself. Believe it. Forget unimportant things; focus on becoming the best version of you. Stop comparing your growth to the person next to you, to your friend, peer, or coworker. Zen Shin said it best: "A flower does not think of competing with the flower next to it. It just blooms." Find the silver lining in bad things you've been through. Use sadness creatively, and turn it into happiness. Give yourself grace; don't give yourself timelines unless they're constructive.

Bronna: Thank you so much for everything, Francesca. Last one. What can we expect from you in the future—season 6 of *Orange Is the New Black*, new television roles, projects, etc.?

Francesca: Thank you!! This has been a blast, and I love everything this magazine stands for. In the future, you can expect the unexpected - and I say that, because not even I know what will happen! Season six of *Orange Is The New Black* is wildly entertaining, thoughtful, and interesting as usual -and I can't say much more than that... but as far as other projects, we'll have to see. I have a long list of ambitions, and I hope to make a name for myself on television, film, and stage. I just wake up every morning and put the energy out there. I work hard on staying creative, and keeping those juices flowing. I have a feeling it's going to be a wild ride, so stay tuned...



**LET'S
TALK
ABOUT:**

**MENTAL
HEALTH**

When I tossed my cap into the air with my graduating class, left my school for the very last time, and stepped into an unknown territory in my life, it hit. Anxiety infected me like a virulent virus. I was plagued with the worry of student loans, six-figure college debt, and worst of all, leaving everyone I loved behind. I was lost.

During the summer, I'll be honest. I spent most nights crying into my pillow, praying that summer would last forever. I bit my nails down to the stubs, tensed at every mention of college, and froze up when someone mentioned New York.

Since I was a freshman, NYC had been my biggest dream, so the fact that I was going in a couple months shouldn't have fazed me. It did more than just that. I crippled me to the point where I couldn't think about college or leaving behind my loved ones without starting a mental breakdown. It hit me, and it hit hard.

Ever since I was younger, I've ignored the importance of my mental health, because I didn't think it was a top priority. I shoved it to the back of my mind—where all my other worries reside—and decided I'd see someone about my anxiety issues when I turn 18. That number crept up a digit each time I turned a year older.

When I said goodbye to my parents and watched them drive away from PACE University, something blew up inside of me. I spent those first three weeks of college wallowing in self doubt, anxiety, and worries. I checked off every day as an accomplishment, and that's what got me through.

When I finally met some people—who I now consider some of my closest friends—I learned something very important from them. They take their mental health very seriously. When I told them about my anxiety, they asked me which medications I took. When I replied with the fact that I don't take medication for it and I don't see a therapist or counselor, my friends looked at me dumbfounded.

That day, I promised my friends that I would always do my absolute best to put my self care and mental health at the top of my priority list. Now I like taking small self care nights, having rant sessions with friends, and I'm currently working on booking my first counseling session.

The stigma around mental health didn't fully break for me until I entered college. I want to help bring that break in the stigma to a much younger level. Here's to educating ourselves on mental health so we can feel healthier and safer in our own minds and bodies.

These sources below are some that I've invested my time in, because they're factual and quick, yet also helpful beyond compare.

<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/>

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml>

In this world we are not alone no matter what we're feeling. There is always help, support, and guidance to those who seek it out and need it. Let's challenge the barrier around the world of mental health and seek out correct diagnoses so we can all live happier, healthier lives.

POSITIVELY BODY POSITIVE

Here at Pretty Smart magazine, we're aware that it's hard for every woman to find clothes that perfectly fit them. It's also seemingly impossible to find brands with body positive messages. That's why we're bringing some brands to you here. Say hello to your new go to shopping destinations.

Aerie

This body positive company stopped retouching and airbrushing their models in 2014 with their #AerieReal starring Iskra Lawrence, body positive advocate. They provide soft, beautiful clothing that's tailored to fit the everyday girl in high school and college.

Modcloth

"We don't have professional models on our site ... We've never been a company that has misrepresented or altered the photos of our models." Modcloth's CMO stated this, confirming what everyone believes to be true: Modcloth is for all women of all sizes.

*Blue stockings
Boutique*

This beautiful boutique has this as its mission statement: "to empower people who have been marginalized by the mainstream lingerie industry and to offer them an experience that reflects their identities, their bodies, and their values." If you need another reason to love this brand, then just check out the beautiful clothing on their website.

THINX

Thinx underwear changed the game of women's undergarments when they introduced underwear you could wear during your period. It acts as a pad, and you can free-bleed into it. This revolutionized the way girls could stay sanitary while going through their cycle. I highly recommend investing in a pair of these ASAP.

SMARTGLAMOUR

SmartGlamour is NYC-based boutique that crafts clothes for women XXS-6X and more. You can have them custom tailor your clothing so it fits your body however you like. They want their customers to fall in love with their clothing, and they definitely do.

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THANK YOU

to the amazing...

**Francesca
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**Ryan
Quinn**

**Hannah
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**Aerie, Modcloth,
Bluestockings
Boutique, Thinx, &
SmartGlamour**

Pace University

My readers, for motivating and inspiring me