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## Tess Holliday – On The Path To Becoming Brazen

Interview by *Morgan Mantilla*

Tess Holliday glows like a warm hearth. A woman emanating light and gumption, she envelops you in her big-hearted aura all at once. She is both beauty and thorns: soft and sweet in essence, but not foolish enough to be left without defenses. Holliday's tenderness is accompanied by the wisdom and grit of a difficult past, equipping her with the ability to be simultaneously fiercely strong and gentle. With empathy and determination, she fights for the abolishment of society's restrictive beauty standards. In with diversity! In with women of all sizes! In with unapologetic icons! With the stroke of a hashtag, she ignited the flames of a bold new movement, #EffYourBeautyStandards, her crown jewel. As the ever bodacious model/author/mother/activist grows more empowered by the minute, BASIC sat down to chat with this **BASIC** Rebel herself.



**Clothing** *Black Lotus* (<https://www.blacklotusclothing.com>) in collaboration with Michael Aiello

**BASIC: What attracts you to the fashion world?**

Do you love that I'm smearing peanut butter on bread with my finger while you ask me about fashion? [laughs] I love fashion, I always have. When I was a kid, we didn't have much of it where I was from. Being in Mississippi, we wouldn't get stuff until like four years after it was trendy. I've always really liked that you can be whatever you want to be. I like that you can transform, and that it's glamorous and fun. I just wish there was more diversity. More work can always be done in the size department.

**BASIC: Who inspires you?**

I'm obviously very inspired by Miss Piggy. I like people that are larger than life. I like people that push against society's standards of beauty. I know that Miss Piggy is a Muppet, but she is who she is and she owns it. Dolly Parton, too – she's just so unapologetic about who she is. I'm also inspired by my followers. I meet so many people from all over the world that are doing their own thing and I think, 'Why do you like me? You're way cooler than me!'

**BASIC: What do you think the world needs more of?**

People who aren't afraid to be themselves, unapologetically. I think that we're moving in the right direction. But I wish that companies wouldn't use people as props to get followers. Because they're tuned into the fact that we want to see more diversity and more representation for all kinds of people, sometimes I feel like brands take advantage of that. While I think it's important to have the visibility, it's also important for people to realize that it's not just a catchphrase – it's an actual thing, it's an actual movement. I wish people would educate themselves more on what that means, if it interests them. I'm still learning and growing in the body positive community, in terms of self-love and all that. I think we need a lot more sensitivity and compassion for other people because there is a lot of shit going on in the world right now, especially in America. It's really sad. For marginalized groups, there are not enough people speaking up against what is going on. I think a lot of people are afraid to say something. But now is the time to push back and change things and lift each other up.

**BASIC: Would you say you have been more molded by the things you have been through, or by the things you have strived to become?**

It's probably what I've been through on the journey to become who I am. I'm a child of abuse. I have a lot of trauma in my life that I'm even now still trying to overcome. I've had a very tumultuous life, which is why I decided to write a book. I thought maybe other people can relate to what I've been through. I know it's a journey and not necessarily a destination, and we're always changing and evolving. I still have a lot to learn. Sometimes I feel like even when I'm doing my best, I'm just barely keeping my head above water. Sometimes I feel like I have it all figured out.



**Head Dress** Snake Charmer, **Clothing** Black Lotus

(<https://www.blacklotusclothing.com>)

**BASIC:** Sharing all those personal stories in your book, was that difficult to write? Or was it cathartic?

It was really difficult to write. It was actually much harder than I thought it was going to be. It was cathartic in some ways, but when I was talking about my childhood and all the things that I went through, that was tough. I thought that I was past all of the stuff that shaped me into who I am, good or bad. When I talked about my father, and the abuse that my mother and I went through, it brought up feelings that I wasn't really anticipating. Especially in my relationships, I found myself getting triggered by things that wouldn't normally upset me. Then I had to remind myself that when I started writing the book, I had just had my last child, so he was maybe three months old. I was nursing, and I was super hormonal. I don't recommend that anyone start writing a book when you have a three month old. But even though that made writing it that much harder, I still got so much out of the experience overall. In the end, I found writing the book to be really empowering, and I've learned a lot about myself. I would probably do it again. I would love to write another book, just under different circumstances.

**BASIC: What do you think the future of the concept of beauty looks like?**

I think that could be subjective. I've talked a lot about diversity. It would be great if there could be someone that everyone identified with, because representation is important. Not only girls that are plus size, but someone from the LGBTQ+ community, or people of color – things like that. Even people that are not able-bodied. Including all of that is important to showing that beauty isn't just one thing. It's a lot of different things, and it means a lot of different things to different people. My definition of beauty is different than someone else's. It would be really great for kids coming up in the world to not feel as alone.

**BASIC: Which textile do you feel best describes your essence: silk, leather, denim?**

To be honest, it depends on my mood. Sometimes I'm soft, sometimes I'm rough. I can be a little obnoxious and stubborn and annoying. But I also know that I mean well and that I have a good heart and I always try to be the best that I can be. So I'd probably just be a combination of silk and leather. I'm very much like the memes you see where it's like I either wear all pink or all black. That's me. I even have pink and black on right now. [laughs]

**BASIC: What has surprised you the most about becoming a mother?**

I feel like parenting is just 24/7 guilt. Like there is so much pressure and there is so much guilt. Am I doing this right? Am I screwing them up for the rest of their lives? You realize that you're the person that's completely responsible for how this person grows up. I don't want to be the reason that they're in therapy for the rest of their lives. I really try and find a balance with working and being a mom and spending time with them. I don't want my kids to feel like I was in the makeup chair 24/7 working. It's so much pressure to make sure that you are educating them on the things that you feel are important. I am responsible for how this person comes up in the world, and I want them to be a contributing member of society and a good person. But I know that I only have so much control over that. I do my best but I still wonder whether I'm doing the right thing. I hope I'm doing a good job, but only time will tell. I think personally that's what I focus on most – my relationships. Success and everything is great, but I never want to make the relationships around me suffer because I'm so focused on my career.

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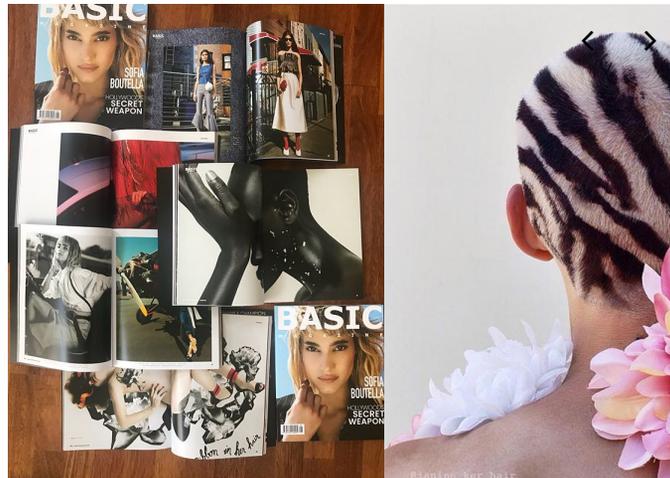
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