

Young Black Breast Cancer Survivors Star in Ads for Rihanna's Lingerie

Savage X Fenty, the pop superstar's brand, is known for its dedication to inclusive representation in popular culture.

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In honor of breast cancer awareness month, Rihanna's lingerie line Savage X Fenty's October campaign exclusively features models who have survived the disease.

All three models are Black, a creative choice meant to call attention to the fact that [Black women are more likely to die of breast cancer](#), in part because they tend to be diagnosed at later stages.

The brainchild of Barbadian pop star-turned-entrepreneur Rihanna, Savage X Fenty has been hailed for its inclusivity since it burst onto the fashion scene in 2018. Its [runway shows](#) feature fat models, Black models, gay models, transgender and nonbinary models, and disabled and chronically ill models in a repudiation of the thin, fit, white, straight and cisgender standard that has traditionally dominated the industry.

The three models were photographed wearing matching bralettes and panties—styles from Savage X Fenty's new capsule collection—against a pink backdrop. Each had an inspiring story of diagnosis, treatment and recovery to share with the world.

Ericka Hart, [whose website](#) describes her as a “a Black queer femme activist, writer, highly acclaimed speaker and award-winning sexuality educator,” was simultaneously diagnosed with HER2-positive and [triple-negative breast cancer](#) in 2014, when she was 28. In one powerful shot from the campaign, she stares into the camera lens as she stands topless, hand on hip, baring her surgery-scarred chest for all to see. In a [statement to CNN](#), she said modeling for Savage X Fenty was a singularly empowering experience.

“The Savage X Fenty campaign was affirming of my experience as not just a breast cancer survivor but all of my intersections of identity as a Black, queer, nonbinary femme,” Hart said. “Many cancer campaigns focus on one aspect, your chronic illness but not how your various identities play a role in how you navigate cancer...I also loved that the campaign didn't focus on poses that focused on strength as the sole image for living with breast cancer, but rather is just showcasing people who want to share their experience to make a difference for someone else.”

Nykia McKenzie, a 26-year-old model whose left breast “was the size of a mini-watermelon” before she was finally diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma in April 2020, told CNN she was heartened by the campaign’s focus on raising awareness of racial disparities in cancer outcomes.

“Knowing that these images will be seen worldwide means everything to me, mainly because I know now my story is being heard and that my story was always bigger than me because the triumph is even bigger,” McKenzie said. “I know now that Black women will be heard in regards to our health and our healing. I hope these images convey to you all that there’s work to do, and that starts with listening to young women who look like me.”

Model Cayatanita Leiva is also a 34-year-old survivor of triple-negative breast cancer. “When I received that kind of news, it was pretty devastating for me,” [she told Savage X Fenty](#) about being diagnosed in 2018 at age 32. In addition to modeling in the campaign, she walked the runway at the live show in Los Angeles, a moment immortalized in the Amazon documentary [Savage X Fenty Show Vol. 2](#). “What was...great was having to bring things to light and to share my personal journey,” Leiva told CNN.

Up to \$250,000 of the proceeds of sales of the capsule collection will be donated to the Clara Lionel Foundation to benefit Black people with breast cancer. The [charity](#), founded by Rihanna in 2012, “supports and funds groundbreaking and effective education and emergency response programs around the world.”

Since their incorporation in the late 2010s, Rihanna’s business ventures, which also include the cosmetics line Fenty Beauty (Fenty is her legal surname), have become known for their commitment to social justice. Fenty Beauty, for example, [pushed back](#) against the historic erasure of Black women in the beauty industry by developing products for a range of skin tones, from the lightest light to the darkest dark.

To learn more about breast cancer, click [here](#). And read about how [fitness](#) and a [high-fiber diet](#) can help prevent breast cancer and may improve outcomes in people with the disease.