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an intersectional magazine for women & nonbinary people of color

# SPEKTRA



## FROM THE EDITOR

**SPEKTRA** is an identity-based fashion, beauty, and lifestyle content magazine written and edited by and for women & nonbinary people of color. Though our content has specific audience, we encourage all to read it. Diverse content broadens our understanding of the human experience, making for a more inclusive and empathetic world that we want to be a part of. We understand that representation is empowering: stories of marginalized folx are shared experiences that are innately relatable and should be made visible. It is vital that our content is intersectional — that it presents an analytical look at how race, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic status, disability, mental health, and body image impact one another. We are challenging Eurocentric and unrealistic beauty standards, discussing beauty as a social construct, highlighting gender-nonconforming styles, promoting QTPOC + WOC-owned brands, and making space for underrepresented faces and voices. In today's highly turbulent and polarized society, we hope that our impact, however small, is one with a sense of resilience.

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# Curls & Coils

How Women of Color Are Using Natural Hair to Change Mainstream Perceptions of Beauty

By Janice Williams & Jessica Durham via Newsweek

Kinky, curly, coily, wavy—these are a few descriptions of hair textures that naturally crown the heads of women of color. In mainstream media, though, actual depictions of that follicle diversity is a rarity. The emphasis, instead, is on an outdated and non-inclusive style of beauty: straight hair.

Well, times up, straight hair: Women are pushing back, embracing their curls and coils. “Ever since I started *The Real* I’m just so happy,” Tamera Mowry-Housley told *Newsweek*. “Just imagine being told that this isn’t beautiful, and then to go out there and be like, you know what, screw what anybody else thinks. This is beautiful.”

Mowry-Housley, one of the daytime talk show’s four co-hosts, is usually rocking her natural curls on camera. Back in the '90s, when she appeared on the WB hit *Sister Sister*—alongside her identical twin Tia Mowry—her tight curls were part of her signature look. When she landed a seat at *The Real*’s roundtable years later, she made the decision to wear her natural curls, despite being told repeatedly by casting directors that her hair was an unruly distraction.

“I went out to auditions and the casting director said I did very well, I am doing well. But she couldn’t get past my hair,” Mowry-Housley said. “When you’re growing up in the business and this is what people are saying, it makes you feel self-conscious.”

Outlets like *Essence* and *Ebony* magazine have long broken that mold, featuring women and men of all shades and hair-types. And in recent years, the more mainstream *Vogue*, *Glamour* and *People* have begun to dot their pages with celebrities—like Black-ish star Tracee Ellis Ross—who celebrate the diversity of black hair. That’s a good first step, says Lindsey Day, the President and Editor in Chief of *CRWN*, a quarterly publication that celebrates black artists, culture and lifestyle. But if media brands ever hope to make an impactful difference, they need to understand the cultural significance and heritage of natural hair.

**“We have to make sure that’s coming all the way down the line, from the the hairstylist to the the makeup artist to the photographers to the creative director to the producers,” said Phillips. “They all make a difference because images are powerful.”**

“It seems as though people latch onto the trends—the #blackgirlmagic hashtag or the #teamnatural hashtag or whatever it may be—and sometimes there’s confusion around what it means,” she said. “Sometimes people are so intent on getting the woman with the natural hair on the cover that they don’t understand that you can’t cut off her antenna—you know [like] with Solange—or cut off her hair.”

Day is referring to the unfortunate decision of the British newspaper *The Evening Standard* to remove crown braids from an image of Solange Knowles in October 2017. Backlash ensued, as it did a month later, when another British publication, *Grazia UK*, photoshopped Black Panther star Lupita Nyong’o’s naturally kinky hair to appear sleeker and smoother for its cover. Nyong’o tweeted, “dtmh”—“don’t touch my hair.”

Model and actress Jourdana Philips was one of six black models to walk the 2017 Victoria Secret Fashion Show

runway last November. It was only the second time in the show’s history that natural-haired black women were featured. (Maria Borges, an Angolan model, was the first in 2015.) Exposure is key to making natural hair desirable on and off the runway, and it begins with fashion and beauty brands. Following her *VSFS* debut, Phillips used her supermodel platform to implore designers to employ more models with different hair textures, and to provide a staff of people who understand how to style and treat natural hair, not just smooth it to a silky finish.

“We have to make sure that’s coming all the way down the line, from the the hairstylist to the makeup artist to the photographers to the creative director to the producers,” said Phillips. “They all make a difference because images are powerful.”

“We have to take responsibility in creating these images,” she added, “and we can only do that by making sure that we have diverse people that are also creating them as well.” †



# The Limits of Fashion's Inclusivity

By Sinéad Burke for The New York Times

Beauty is being redefined — this is something on which most of us can agree. The era of the white, thin, Eurocentric model as the only embodiment of glamour is gone. The runways have embraced diversity of skin, shape and age. But for one group they still lag behind: people with disabilities.



Brenda, in "Portrait Positive."

Source: NYTimes, Rankin

Now a new book, "Portrait Positive," featuring images of 16 women with facial disfigurements by the British photographer Rankin, is aiming to change that. The book's creator, Stephen Bell, managing director of the events company Epitome Celebrations, describes himself as having a "visible difference": When he was born, four fingers on his right hand were fused together. To increase independence and mobility, his index finger was surgically separated in childhood. Yet he reached adolescence without visible role models or an understanding of his disability, he said, feeling isolated, insecure and unsure of what he could be and do.

By chance, 10 years ago Mr. Bell, now 39, came across images online of people who looked just like him, and via the warrens of the internet discovered he had been born with a condition called syndactyly: joined digits that can result in webbing of the skin. It is the second most common congenital hand condition and occurs in around one in every 1,000 births, yet neither Mr. Bell's parents nor his doctors provided him with the label or language to describe what had happened.

The idea for "Portrait Positive" was born two years ago when Mr. Bell approached the London-based designer Steven Tai with the idea of using fashion as a framework to raise questions about codes of appearance. Mr. Tai was keen to participate, because he had "always believed in the acceptance and celebration of one's insecurities," Mr. Tai said, and hoped that "this project not only opens up the standards of beauty, but also lets these women know that they are beautiful."

The book will raise funds for Changing Faces, a British-based charity that supports and represents children, young people and adults who have a visible difference to the face, hands or body, whether present from birth or caused by accident, injury, illness or medical episode. The project will also exist outside of the book format; Brenda, Chloe and Raiché, three women who had their portraits taken by Rankin, walked in Mr. Tai's London Fashion Week presentation.

The fashion industry has a difficult history with disability. It has rarely considered people with disabilities to be valuable consumers (despite the



Raiché, one of the subjects of the book "Portrait Positive."

Source: NYTimes, Rankin

fact there are estimated one billion worldwide), while simultaneously exploiting the objects and devices associated with the disabled.

A Steven Klein cover of Interview magazine, for example, had Kylie Jenner photographed in a gold wheelchair. Helmut Newton famously photographed Nadja Auermann modeling stilettos, leg braces, canes and a prop wheelchair.

There have, however, been moments that suggested change. Aimee Mullins, a double-amputee model, appeared on the Alexander McQueen catwalk in the spring 1999 show; Mama Cax, an amputee, modeled on the runway for Chromat recently at New York Fashion Week (and was featured in Teen Vogue's current disability-focused series); and Olay's new #FaceAnything campaign features the model

Jillian Mercado, who has a disability. "Portrait Positive" is part of this continuum.

But it goes only so far. The question now is whether this moment can gather enough momentum to become the norm. Carly Findlay, a writer, speaker and activist from Australia, challenges thinking about what it is like to have a visibly different appearance. Ms. Findlay has ichthyosisform erythroderma, a condition that affects the skin, leaving it red and sometimes scaly. Recently, she organized and ran Access to Fashion, a disability-focused event at Melbourne Fashion Week. "The community aspect was wondrous," she said, "everyone coming together to celebrate disability pride."

Yet she does not want the event to be held again next year, at least not in its current format. She



Catrin's photograph from "Portrait Positive."

Source: NYTimes, Rankin

wants access and inclusion to be embedded in fashion, as opposed to isolated as "other," the way it is (even with the best intentions) in "Portrait Positive."

"I hope that 'Portrait Positive' really does change the way beauty is perceived, but why aren't women with facial differences included in a mainstream book?" Ms. Findlay asked.

"Why can't beauty just be — why does facial difference have to be radical?"

Other activists agree, saying that the next challenge is to ensure that those with disabilities are not just used to provoke empathy and inspiration in an image, but are also in the rooms where decisions are made, and changes can occur that will reach and impact millions. †



Gloria Lucas, founder of Nalgona Positivity Pride  
Source: <https://nalgonapositivitypride.com>

# Meet the Woman Who's 'Decolonizing' Body Positivity for Women of Color

After surviving an eating disorder, Gloria Lucas is helping women of color love their bodies.

By Tanisha Love Ramirez for Huffington Post

Body positivity movements are not one size fits all. Women from diverse backgrounds have different experiences, struggles and social influences, all of which inform the way they view their individual bodies. They subsequently require and deserve culturally relevant resources that address and embrace those differences. With this in mind, Gloria Lucas founded Nalgona Positivity Pride (NPP), a multi-platform "Xican@-Brown\*-Indigenous" network dedicated to raising eating disorder awareness in communities of color and "decolonizing" body positivity.

A self-described "chubby warrior, DIY punx educator, and eating disorder survivor," Lucas launched NPP two years ago in response to the pervasiveness of heteronormative, white ideals shared through mainstream body-positive movements.

"I struggled with binge eating and bulimia for a very long time, and I didn't seek help," Lucas shares. She says the dearth of mainstream coverage of Latinas' experiences with eating disorders is one of the reasons she did not speak out at the time. "Nalgona Positivity Pride was my opportunity to give back to the community and offer what I wish I would have had during those very tough times with my eating disorder."

**"NPP...[recognizes] the roles colonization, assimilation, systemic oppression and racism play in the development of low self-esteem and mental illnesses like eating disorders among people of color."**

Many Latinas struggle with disordered eating and body image issues. In fact, there's evidence to suggest that more acculturated Latinas may be particularly susceptible to developing disordered eating patterns. Ignoring their struggles isn't just deplorable, it's dangerous.

The most common diagnoses for Latinas is Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS), a common and deadly eating disorder that does not meet the criteria for anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or binge eating — which in turn makes it very difficult to treat.

It's facts like these that drove Lucas to create NPP.

A multifaceted project that includes a website, an Etsy store, access to bilingual resources and an eating disorders support group, NPP sets itself apart from mainstream eating disorder resources and body positive movements by recognizing the roles colonization, assimilation, systemic oppression and racism play in the development of low self-esteem and mental illnesses like eating disorders among people of color.

"NPP first addresses the fact that the problem isn't really us; it's the way the system works," explains Lucas. "People of color received very mixed messages about their bodies. There's the message that we're inferior, that we are dirty, that we are ugly, that we're not intelligent." Those messages, Lucas says, have been passed down from generation to generation, and often perpetuate the belief that white, slender bodies are desirable; and darker, curvier bodies are not.

Making matters worse is the fact that many present-day body positive movements purport to embrace diverse bodies, but fail to represent and include women of color. Lucas addresses these issues in-person through her workshops, as well as online via NPP's various social accounts and Etsy store.

With the help of local artists and friends, Lucas designs and sells t-shirts, buttons and stickers that empower, reflect and uplift "Xicana-Brown\*-Indigenous" people. "I just feel a really big need to be creative and to put out there what I'm feeling, what I'm thinking and people are responding to it," she shares. "It makes it clear that there aren't many things out there that are meeting our needs as brown people."

**"Nalgona Positivity Pride was my opportunity to give back to the community and offer what I wish I would have had during those very tough times with my eating disorder."**

Lucas is also working on a Zine which will be titled "I'm Not White And I Have An Eating Disorder." In the future, the L.A.-based Xicana hopes to take her work on the road with a fashion truck. "It's like a mobile boutique where I can go to places and sell my merch and give workshops," Lucas explains. "I'm really focusing on highlighting the voices of brown women. Part of the reason we don't love ourselves is that we don't get celebrated, we don't get recognize. I want to use my t-shirts and my posters and my stickers to celebrate us."

Thank you, Gloria. Thank you. †

*\*Lucas uses "brown\*" to refer to the "mixed descendants of the indigenous from (what is known today as) the Americas," as well as Afro-Latinos.*

# BEAUTY Beyond UTTY Binaries

By Janet Mock *Beauty Beyond Binaries is a biweekly column about the intersection of beauty and identity on allure.com by writer, TV host, and activist Janet Mock.*

Source: Saint Heron



#### Author's Note:

Since I began *Beauty Beyond Binaries* in May, I've written essays that explore many aspects of beauty, from the concepts of "pretty privilege" and using self-preservation as a form of protest to my personal triggers around haircuts. Though I love being able to express myself and share my experiences, I've also been eager to bring voices beyond my own into this space. It is part of the reason I made RuPaul's Drag Race finalist Peppermint our first BBB profile subject (I have more to come!), and why I've requested your voices. In an effort to include even more perspectives, my editors and I asked readers on Allure's Instagram account and my Facebook page for their most pressing questions, spanning hair care to self-care. While I am not a beauty or health care professional, I have navigated my way through pervasive beauty standards and personal style, as well as the tangles and dryness of my curly fro. I hope that sharing how I got through – or am continuing to get through – will be helpful to you.

Below is my first attempt at answering your questions. And please keep them coming! There's plenty of advice to go around.

*I'm a trans WOC, and I struggle with dysphoria tied into white beauty standards. It feels like the media, surgeons, and other trans women encourage TWOC to conform to white beauty standards in order to pass". So how do you combat dysphoria while embracing your natural beauty? Thank you! - Neha R.*

We are all inundated with images that present a limited scope of what is considered beautiful. For American women, the closer she is to whiteness/paleness, cisness, thinness, and femininity, the more she is considered beautiful. These physical ideals shaped and heavily impacted how I saw myself as a brown-skinned black and native Hawaiian trans girl with frizzy, curly hair and a large forehead, especially as my physical appearance began to shift during puberty between ages 13 and 15. This marked my most intense gender dysphoria as I compared myself to images of what felt like the most unattainable white cisnormative beauty.

I was able to make it through with affirmative friendships, images, and vital medical care. As a teen, I surrounded

myself with other trans girls of color who were my friends and peers, and we were able to navigate our transitions together in sisterhood, piggybacking on one another's health care, sewing body padding, finding safety by socializing in groups, experimenting with makeup and hair tools, and throwing harmless shade at one another.

Because none of my friends were black, I turned to images of black women in the media – Destiny's Child, Janet Jackson, and Lauryn Hill were my beauty idols. I pasted their images onto my bedroom walls, and I sought refuge in their hair texture, their deep, rich skin color, the shapes of their bodies. I would recommend that you seek affirmative images where you can find them and surround yourself with your own mosaic of brown girl beauty.

Most vital, I also gained access to hormone replacement therapy at 15 which helped me feel more at ease in my body and more confident in my form. Eventually, I began to reveal the girl I knew myself to be, and I was able to blend in which provided me a level of access and safety as a trans girl of color. I was also seen as attractive in most spaces, and these are conditional privileges that are not granted to many trans women, specifically other low-income trans girls of color

who do not have access to necessary medical care, from HRT to cost-prohibitive procedures like facial feminization surgery, which can cost upwards of \$100k.

None of our experiences with our bodies and these ideals are identical, so there is no one-size-fits-all solution to combatting dysphoria. But I will say that affirmative relationships, images and access to healthcare are resources we should all have access to. And what's exciting about being alive and trans today is that we are not limited to the media's narrow perception of trans womanhood that I grew up with on TV and film (just think of Silence of the Lambs and Jerry Springer) – we are creating our own images with our own celebrities. How great is it that trans girls of color can grow up in a world with Torrairie, Vivek Shraya, Maya Monès, Isis King, Anjali Lama, Juliana Huxtable, Angelica Ross, Amiyah Scott, Leyna Bloom, and Laverne Cox, who started #TransIsBeautiful.

*I just want to know: what is your hair-care regimen??! It's vital!" - Chloe E.*

I would advise you to follow this routine: condition, cut, and condition!

I wash my hair about three times a week, twice with a non-sulfate, non-sudsy co-wash treatment (my favorite is Hair Rules Cleansing Cream) and once with a sudsy shampoo, like Davines OI Shampoo. If you have coarse curly hair like mine, it can

tend to be very dry at the ends, so I recommend heavily conditioning your curls after each wash (right now I'm obsessed with MarulaOil Light and Curls Coconut Sublime conditioner).

I am more of a wash-and-go kind of girl for my daily routine, but that does mean that I don't use tons of products. Leave-in conditioners, like AG Fast Food, and Cantu's repair cream, as well as creamy styling products (I love Miss Jessie Pillow Soft Curls and Moroccan Oil Intense Curl Cream), are your friends, so I recommend using them. I also like to spritz a root-lifting spray (I love the one from TIGI Catwalk) at the root of the hair at my crown for volume, then usually let it air-dry most of the way – the less heat, the better! – before blow drying it with a diffuser. I then take off the diffuser, flip my hair upside down, and blast it on high with cold air.

For special occasions, if you want to achieve a more polished, high-volume look, you could use a small curling wand with a heat protective spray (like Kenra's Blow-Dry Mist) for definition and maybe use some curly clip-ins for even bigger hair (lots of people rave about Kurly Klips). To preserve your style, you can sleep with a silk bonnet to maintain my curl definition and keep product off of your pillowcase.

Getting your hair cut every 3 to 4 months is essential, as well. I would recommend finding a stylist, like Anthony Dickey at Hair Rules salon,

who specializes in curly hair care. He cuts it dry by blowing it out so he doesn't miss a single strand. And if you want to add some color to your hair, it may be smart to ask your colorist to add a strengthening Olaplex treatment to your color. As former stylist Ms. Tina Knowles Lawson told me, "Good hair is healthy hair!"

*What is a piece of advice you wish someone would have told you as a trans youth of color? And why? (P.S. I am a 17-year-old trans girl, who admires and looks up to you very much.) - Stella K.*

First off, thank you so much for this affirmation, Stella. When I was younger, I wish I would have been told more often that I was right and nothing was wrong with me, that I was deserving of everything this world has to offer, and that my visions for my future were worthy of pursuit. So often, young trans folk – especially those from low-income, people of color communities – are met with barriers every step of the way. These include, but are not limited to: low-resources schools; poverty; hostile home environments and neighborhoods; and a lack of affirmative images, messages and role models.

Today, I am saddened that trans youth of color are still navigating similar obstacles that I had to navigate as a young person. I,

alongside many others, are fighting for a world where young people like you are able to move past survival and are able to dream bigger and have grander visions for a thriving future. I would advise any 17-year-old to surround yourself with people who listen to you, nod when you speak, and smile when you enter spaces. We could all use people who will advocate for us as well and stick up for us when folks are problematic AF. So, I'll end this by saying: You are right. You are deserving. So dream even bigger.

*How did you cultivate your personal style? - Nicolette M.*

My personal style really started in my teens when I gained purchasing power to actually buy my own damn clothes. For so long, my parents dictated what I wore, which largely was their way of containing me within the gender binary. When I finally got a part-time job at the mall working at a women's clothing store, I used my employee discount to buy all the things my teenage girl desires allowed me to. Most of my style was cultivated through popular culture and magazines so I was trendy AF. I would spend hours watching TV, perusing Tower Records for album cover art, clipping out images in magazines, from Vibe and Honey to Teen People, which was my bible then. Girl groups, from Destiny's Child to Blaque, and female artists like Aaliyah, Brandy, Lauryn Hill, and Lil' Kim were pivotal.

As a teen, I really gravitated toward trends with clothing from brands like Baby Phat and Juicy Couture, eventually elevating my personal style through vintage shops in Honolulu and New York City in college and grad school. Vintage shopping allowed me to experiment with classic and even daring silhouettes, to move beyond fast fashion (though I used to love me some Forever 21!) and to appreciate a well-made garment that could help me build my wardrobe.

Today, I would describe my style as classic, in that I appreciate clean lines and silhouettes, but also playful, daring, and sexy (I am all about celebrating my curves). I don't have as much time to sift through the racks of vintage shops, but I love to shop contemporary collections at Nordstrom or Bloomingdales, small curated boutiques like Intermix or Opening Ceremony, and online sites like GILT and ASOS. My go-to brands are Christian Siriano, Jonathan Simkhai, and A.L.C., and I'm obsessed with the styles of Rihanna, Solange, Zendaya, Shiona Turini, and you, Nicolette. †

# Review of OwnBrown, nude lingerie brand for brown women by brown women

By Nadia Akingbule for *gal-dem*



L: Tights in "Yemoya" colourway R: Knee-highs in "Bintu" (Source: OwnBrown)

It is no secret that mainstream fashion outlets do not cater to the needs of Women of Colour (WoC), and for the most part, underwear, tights, and bras are stocked in one shade of nude. Given that a significant amount of women in the world are not in fact beige, there is a huge portion of us struggling to find garments that are a true skin match. Clearly, one colour does not fit all, and so Nadine Ndjoko-Piesker, the CEO of OwnBrown, is patching up the hole in the market with her inclusive line of lingerie.

OwnBrown was founded in 2015, and since then it has established itself as a successful hosiery and lingerie company. Nadine, lawyer

and entrepreneur, explains that OwnBrown came to be through the frustration of not being able to find skin coloured hosiery to wear in her professional life. She says that "As one of the few black female lawyers in Switzerland, I did not want to be seen for my body, nor show off my underwear in such an environment. I wanted to be seen and treated as professional as my male and female counterparts."

So, OwnBrown was born. They operate online and ship globally to the UK, EU, USA and Africa.

Made by a brown woman for other brown women, their items are not a weird faux nude—they

are skin coloured, and suitable for a range of deeper tones. OwnBrown currently provide 4 darker shades: Amani, the lightest of the four described as "café latte"; Bintu is a "caramel" tone while Kimya is likened to "milk chocolate"; and Yemoya, the darkest shade, is a deep brown. Their lingerie is available in all of these shades, including the two types of bra—underwired as well as a triangular bralette—and both are made out of a breathable tulle fabric. They also offer a high-waisted brief and thong, which can be purchased as single items or in matching sets.

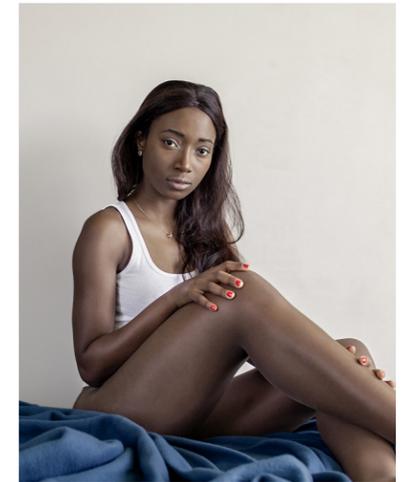
Needless to say, I was eagerly waiting for my parcel to arrive and, low and behold, I was not disappointed. As a woman of mixed heritage, and as someone who rarely sees the sun here in Manchester, I chose the lightest shade, Amani, and it was a solid colour match for me. I also went for the underwired bra and a thong in the same shade.

Visually, the garments are beautifully made, as advertised, of a delicate, lightweight material that's incredibly soft to the touch. Whilst it is worth noting the bra and pants are sheer, it didn't pose any issues for me under my clothes.

I was initially sceptical of the tulle fabric, wondering whether it would offer enough support for someone like myself with a larger bust, but surprisingly it did and my back hurt far less than it would with a normal bra. I didn't feel at all restricted or bound up like a Christmas ham, and there was no uncomfortable rubbing or red marks when I took the bra off. I also noticed that the back of the bra lay flat against my skin, and was almost undetectable through my clothes.

The tulle that the cups are made of was very comfortable, it almost felt like I didn't have a bra on at all, while still maintaining a flattering shape and good support. But it's worth remembering, because of the material and the cups not being moulded, it means when the weather gets "nippy", so do you. Personally, this isn't a huge deal, especially with the level of comfort OwnBrown provides. It's likely it wouldn't be detectable unless you were to wear a thin or tight top, it's simply something to bear in mind.

The thong was very similar to the bra, in that it was made of the same good quality material, and was cut in a shape flattering to most body types while also being sheer and breathable. The



L: Knee-highs in "Amani" colourway R: Tights in "Kimya" (Source: OwnBrown)

underwear was a perfect fit and didn't rub at all, and also didn't give me any weird rolls even when wearing tight trousers or skirts.

I would definitely recommend OwnBrown, especially their bras, which I feel could become a staple in many women's wardrobes. With summer allegedly approaching, OwnBrown will be my go-to for their breathability and support, especially underneath light-coloured clothing where the difference between my skin and their underwear will be undetectable.

Although they don't currently stock past a D cup, OwnBrown

aims to expand their sizing and are currently crowdfunding via Indiegogo. They hope to be able to raise enough in order to produce their range of inclusive shades and hope to put any extra funds towards starting a line for curvier women. They will be featured in Channel 4's Buy It Now series, which airs on Tuesday 22nd May, 5.30pm. †

**ownbrown**  
CLOSE TO YOU

