

> THIS WEEK'S CASE STUDY

The quest to unclasp 'maternity clothes' stigma

Lingerie stylist on a mission to help moms feel beautiful with chic, practical intimates

ANDREW SEALE

SPECIAL TO THE STAR

When Nadine Woods gave birth to her daughter no one told her what the postnatal recovery period would be like. Sure, there were the offhand comments about the length of the process and the undesirable physical health components - like incontinence - but there's this whole hidden, mental underground says Woods, that women tend to push to

"It's a period of a your life nobody seems to really talk about, there's a lot of stuff that goes on and some of those things can have permanent lasting effects on your body - and a lot of women don't know about this,"

"Body image is at one of the lowest points in a woman's life right after she has a baby."

But Woods wanted to feel like herself, she wanted to feel good about how she looked and she wanted fashion and function, so she set to work in 2010 developing a line of maternity lingerie called Mayana Genevière.

"There's this perception that women lose themselves or their sense of style once they become a mother,"

"(And) there's a constant guilt asso-



NICK KOZAK FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Nadine Woods has developed a lux lingerie line for nursing mothers, complete with clasp-free technology that makes bras both sexy and functional. She hopes to tap into the market with the "feel better about yourself" angle.

ciated with taking time for yourself or being extremely hard on yourself to keep up with the Jones' in your mothering abilities."

Even maternity clothes and undergarments seem to neglect monny, emphasizing function rather than style, says Woods.

After four years of research and development, including creating Aluxtra - a clasp-free nursing technology - Woods has launched her site and rolled out the lingerie through five maternity boutiques in the GTA.

But the next step for her business will be the most challenging pushing back against the cultural zeitgeist and convincing women that it's OK to feel sexy - and perhaps more importantly - spend money on themselves during the "fourth trimester."

"It is a sexy and functional brand." says Woods of the Toronto-based company that has three employees in-house for daily operations and two separate, dedicated contractors "Body image is at one of the lowest points in a woman's life right after she has a baby."

OWNER MAYANA GENEVIÈRE

handling design, development and branding.

The line includes features to make breastfeeding easier, moisture wicking fabric and waist cinchers to provide a slimming effect. They're the kind of details Woods hope will entice consumers and help her take a bite out of the estimated \$30 billion global lingerie industry.

But despite the sprawling target demographic, Mayana Genevière is a niche product. After all, many women interested in wearing lingerie during the post-natal phase, Woods included, often buy undergarments a size or two larger and just "make it

Forking over \$60 to \$120 for a bra or pair of underwear is a hefty price tag for something that might only fit for a few months, especially when there are already inexpensive clasp-free maternity tanks for \$30.

Then there's the stigma associated with maternity clothes. Many women don't think they'll feel beautiful in clothes from a maternity store, a taboo that cuts into Woods potential

Brynn Winegard, principal at Toronto-based marketing consultant Winegard and Co., admits that it might be a tough market to crack and even harder to convince women they need it, especially when there are already so many non-maternal lingerie products out there.

"It's been done and is certainly being satisfied by the market," says Wi-

"If her positioning is 'be sexy for your husband' in the fourth trimester then it might be more difficult -

> VITAL STATS

Name: Mavana Genevière Owner: Nadine Woods Address: mayanageneviere.com Contact: info@mayanagene-

Field: Lingerie/maternity wear

Employees: Three Active: Four years

Offering: Maternity lingerie and postnatal education for women

there's nothing particularly sexy about breastfeeding bras."

Winegard says she thinks the "feel better about yourself" angle is definitely a strong value proposition, but convincing women to buy Mayana Genevière maternity lingerie over just buying regular lingerie a size larger will continue to be a challenge.

Still, she says the numbers are on Woods' side with the birth rate being 161 per woman in Canada.

"Even if it is short lived stage in a women's life, most women will go through it for four or five months if not longer and that's per kid," she

In the meantime, Woods hopes to tap into that massive demographic by contributing a portion of every garment to Maternal Goddess, an organization she founded a year ago to help women understand the postnatal recovery period.

She feels a close affiliation between the organization and her vision of educating women about the seldomdiscussed elements of the fourth trimester, and encouraging them to allow themselves to feel sexy as they work through the post-pregnancy healing process.

"I see a shift happening and I feel I'm on time with the lingerie," says Woods, "It is responding to the needs and the shifts of this culture, women are becoming more aware, they want to be more informed, they're more aware of choices whether it be in birthing or breastfeeding, they are body image conscious - I think if anything the lingerie is a complement to the time.'