

# THINXING HARD

WOMEN-LED UNDERWEAR TECH FIGHTS PERIOD STIGMA



By Alex Harrell

Photo courtesy of Thinx

Notice anything about the subway ads lately? They're majority owned or established by women. Ritual, Capsule, Billie, Daily Harvest, Amika — just to name the brands I saw on my commute today.

That may have to do with the fact that over the past two decades, the number of women-owned businesses has increased by 6.2 million firms, according to the 2017 State of Women-Owned Businesses Report.

Financial data and software company PitchBook reported that U.S. companies with a least one female founder brought in \$7.2 billion in venture capital funding during the first half of 2018 — about 12.5% of all venture capital (VC) collected at that point. While the #MeToo movement has influenced VC habits, U.S. female-founded startups raised only 2.2% of VC investment in 2018, according to TechCrunch. Less than 10% of decision makers at VC firms are women, and 74% of them have zero female investors.

But it's not all doom and gloom for lady bosses; the National Association of Women Business Owners reported that there's an estimated 11.6 million women-owned businesses in America

that employ nearly nine million people and generate more than \$1.7 trillion in revenue. That number has grown 114% over the past 20 years. Compared to a 44% increase among all businesses, a growth rate more than 2.5 times the national average isn't too shabby.

That said, Fashion Manuscript spoke with the sometimes controversial, always disruptive and definitely innovative Thinx, Inc.

Thinx are underwear that absorb your period, period. Made with a patented design and four-layer technology (moisture-wicking cotton, an odor-trapping lining, absorbent fabric and a leak-resistant barrier), the panties can be worn in place of other feminine hygiene products or as a fail-safe backup to ensure your white pants stay white.

Founded in 2011 by Antonia Saint Dunbar, Miki Agrawal and Radha Agrawal, the company was named as one of the best inventions of 2015 by Time and one of the most innovative companies in 2017 by Forbes.

That's when things got a bit dicey for the period-proof company.

From allegations of sexual harassment and hostile working environments to battles with the MTA as well as the City of New York on Human Rights, "SHE-E-O" Miki Agrawal stepped down and left her company leaderless for five months.

That's when Maria Molland took over as CEO of Thinx, Inc. Under her leadership, the brand is bouncing back with a renewed dedication to fighting taboos around women's health.

"Many people with periods who live close or below the poverty line can't afford menstrual hygiene products, and for young people, that often means they miss school during their periods," Molland said. "This obviously just extends the generational cycle of poverty. As a company we have called attention to this issue, as well as donated money and product, which I am really proud of."

Molland also has some personal reasons for rebuilding Thinx.

"I also find inspiration and motivation from my daughter, Inga," she said. "I want her to grow up and be proud of who her mom is and for her to know she can do anything if she puts her mind to it."