Interviewer: (00:00:25) Today is September 10, 2025. It is 11:32 a.m. and this is focus group 3005. Before we begin, I want to help our minds think creatively and openly. We're not sharing things about ourselves, like our names or any personal information. I have one short question to help us get to know each other a little bit. That is, what animal do you most relate to and why? I, today, will say an owl because they're quiet and they like it when it's dark out. Anyone else want to kick us off? Ivy?

Ivy: Sure. I've been really drawn to doves lately.

Interviewer: (1:12) Any reason why?

Ivy: I think they have a peace association.

Interviewer: (1:23) Others? Stefani?

Stefani: I think I've just seen them a lot, but capybaras. They're funny and cute, also fast. I don't know.

Interviewer: (1:39) How about you, Lily?

Lily: I like a vixen. I think they're smart. I think they're quick. I think they're sharp. I remember thinking in elementary school that was an animal I wanted to be. I received a little bit of negative feedback from my peers about it. Upon a decade or two of reflection, I stand by it. It's a very cool little animal.

Interviewer: (2:03) Lavender, what about you?

Lavender: I like a pink ostrich. I like how their color is just so bright. It's bright and tropical.

Interviewer: (2:22) Thanks for sharing everyone. We're very happy that each of you are a part of our discussion today. For the rest of the discussion, we will talk about menstrual cycles. People sometimes use different words when talking about the menstrual cycle, or the days of the month when they are bleeding. What are some of the words that you use? Lily, it looks like you were going to say something.

Lily: I'm thinking. I think I just refer to it as "my period". That's consistently what I've done.

Lavender: "my cycle".

Interviewer: (2:53) Lavender, cycle. Others?

Stefani: Mainly "period".

Interviewer: (2:59) Period, Stefani.

Ivy: I would say "period". I used the word "menses" recently, but no one knew what I was talking about. (Laughter.)

Interviewer: (3:12) Other words that you hear of or terms that people may use, may not be what you use yourself, but anything else out there? Lily?

Lily: People talk about "time of the month" a lot.

Lavender: They make up funny names like "bloody Mary".

Lily: "Aunt Flo is visiting".

Interviewer: (3:35) Anything else? (No audible response.) How do people usually keep track of their menstrual cycles, to know when they might start bleeding?

Lily: Do you mean us, specifically or how we know about our peers?

Interviewer: (3:54) Both, either.

Lily: I'm Lily and I have friends who use various period apps on their phones. I will say I have also heard those same friends talk about how, in the current climate, that's something that they're a little bit less comfortable doing, inputting that kind of data onto a database that could get spread around for who knows what.

Interviewer: (4:16) Others? Stefani?

Stephani: I mainly use my birth control, to be honest. I had such irregular periods before taking it, so now I'm like, "When I stop taking my last pill, it's going to start a few days after that."

Interviewer: (4:34) Lavender?

Lavender: I have lost track because I've been on Mirena forever. So, I don't even see any…. I've been on Mirena so long. It's never going to—

Interviewer: (4:58) It's hard to keep track.

Lavender: It's never going to show me anything because I haven't seen anything in so long.

Interviewer: (5:04) Hold that thought because we'll get to that. We'll get into it. Any final thoughts on how we keep track? Yes, Ivy?

Ivy: I've got to say, I don't keep track. Partially, I think that maybe says something about my relationship to time or whatever. Also, it just comes so randomly, I don't see any point for me in keeping track.

Lavender: I had that same thought too before being put on the Mirena. People would ask me, "When.. blah, blah, blah, blah, blah?" (possibly referring to a common question like "when was your last period?" or "first day of your last menstrual cycle?") I don't even keep track. I don't even write it down. I just let my body tell me when it's coming, which will be painful stomach cramps. And now, I don't even get those painful stomach cramps. I guess the Mirena stops it all.

Interviewer: (6:05) Now is a great segue. We're going to dive into all those types of things. Just so we have the same understanding as we go forward, when I say, "Menstrual cycle," I'm talking about the monthly cycles that people who menstruate have. This includes the days of the month when you are bleeding, the time before you bleed, the time just after, and any time in-between. Does that make sense? (No audible response.) Now, I want you to think about how your own menstrual cycles have changed while using contraception. Lavender kicked us off with that. These are both changes that you have liked and changes that you have not liked. First, can you please tell me about ways that contraception has changed how often you have bleeding, how often? Lavender, you started talking about that. Do you want to share a little bit? How often has it changed?

Lavender: I haven't seen, not even felt... I've been on this current Mirena for three plus years. They change it every… I think like four or five years.

Interviewer: (7:33) What about others? Changes to how often… Ivy?

Ivy: I'm on my third Nexplanon. I started when I was 18. For probably three or four years, like Lavender said, I didn't have any bleeding whatsoever. And I loved that. That was awesome. Then, one day, I woke up, and there was so much blood everywhere. I was like, "There's something really wrong with me." I went to the hospital, and they were like, "You just got your period." I was like, "Why did that start?" (Laughter.) Since then, there have been times when it's been really light. Right now, currently, I am well over my third week of having my period continuously. That never happened to me before. I don't remember that well what it was like before I turned 18. That's the last time I wasn't on birth control, but I know it's changed a lot. Previously, for about three years, it stabilized to a pattern where I was having my period twice a month. I could tell there was a real period and a fake period. One was what you would expect, and then one was lighter, but they were the same. They both were about a little over a week, and then separated by about a week. Now, I don't know what's changed.

Interviewer: (9:17) What about Stefani?

Stefani: I've been on birth control since I was 14. During that time, it would be so irregular. I would get it one month. I wouldn't get it another month. I never really had cramps or anything. Then, when I got to college, I think I switched birth control. I don't remember which one it was. I started getting really bad cramps, to the point where I couldn't even get up and walk. I went off of that birth control and then I went off of birth control completely for a while. I wouldn't have my period for three months. Then, when I had it, it was painful and dark and all the stuff. I went back on. Now, I'm on Yaz. They put me on Yaz a few years ago, and now my period is the most regular thing. I go off my birth control every Wednesday. The day I go off my birth control, it starts. I can tell you how many days it's going to last. I've never had it be so consistent.

Interviewer: (10:27) Lily, what about you? How often?

Lily: I started going on birth control in my early 20s. I'm in my mid 30s now. Before that, I had a very regular period. It came about once a month, it lasted for about five to six days. I would get stomach symptoms in the days leading up to it. I went on a progesterone-only pill in my early 20s for a little while. If I recall correctly, that didn't affect my menstrual cycle very much, at least that I could tell, but it did have some other negative side effects that I didn't like. In my mid 20s, I started with my first IUD. Once I got that IUD, after a few months of slowing down in terms of volume and duration, my period eventually just went away. I've been on that—a few different IUDs now, as they've expired, the better part of a decade. I haven't had a full period since. Every now and then, from what I can tell are completely random circumstances, I'll get a little bit of spotting, very minimal, probably under a tablespoon of fluid. It's usually old fluid generally. I don't experience any cycle symptoms that I can tell you about, so none of the stomach pain that I would get in the days leading up to a period, and no visible period whatsoever. I'm very pleased with that.

Lavender: I just wanted to share, after hearing everyone else's story, that I didn't mention, when I was 21 or 22, that's when I started experiencing heavy periods. I would be back and forth to the doctor. I was getting told different things. Long story short, I had uterine fibroids. So, that's why I got on the Mirena, because that's all they could find or think of that could stop me from bleeding so heavy. I needed a four-pint blood transfusion because the blood wouldn't stop. I had to be hospitalized, and they had to give me a pill because it was just non-stop. And this big old thing came out of me; like, it looked like a baby, so I have to be on the Mirena because I have so many uterine fibroids that will just make me

bleed, bleed, bleed..

Interviewer: (13:41) I have some more questions about how your menstrual cycles have changed. This next one is about how regularly you have bleeding. Some of you have touched on that. If you already have, just sum up, how has contraception changed regularly you're not bleeding? Lily?

Lily: Regularly? It's completely gotten rid of it. I have no bleeding.

Interviewer: (14:06) Ivy?

Ivy: Contraception has made bleeding incredibly irregular and unpredictable.

Interviewer: (14:13) Irregular?

Ivy: Yes.

Stefani: Contraception has made bleeding incredibly regular and very scheduled.

Interviewer: (14:25) Lavender, go ahead.

Lavender: Contraception has made bleeding disappear. I just, I never see it.

Interviewer: (14:35) Another great segue. Now I want you to tell me how contraception has changed how long you have bleeding. Lavender?

Lavender: I never see it.

Interviewer: (14:46) You never see it.

Lavender: Yes.

Interviewer: (14:49) What about you, Stefani? How long do you have bleeding?

Stefani: I actually don't necessarily remember. I just remember it being really irregular. I think I would bleed for a week to a week-and-a-half. Then, it switched to two days. Now, it's three, four days.

Interviewer: (15:10) Ivy?

Ivy: Before I was on birth control, I had the sense that I had really light periods. I don't remember them being irregular, so I think they were fairly regular. They just didn't last very long. They'd be five days. Now, I'd say the duration is ever increasing. This study is coming at an interesting time because I've never had one quite this long. I'm like, "How long can it last?" (Laughter.)

Interviewer: (15:45) Lily?

Lily: Zero days.

Interviewer: (15:47) Zero days?

Lily: Yes, I have no visible period.

Interviewer: (15:51) Now, I want to hear how contraception has changed how much you bleed during those days. Lily and Lavender, no bleeding.

Lavender: Yes.

Lily: The occasional spotting, but I don't think that counts as… I don't think that's part of a regular cycle.

Interviewer: (16:07) Stefani, what about you? The days that you're bleeding, how has it changed how much you bleed on those days?

Stefani: I feel like it's gotten heavier. I feel like it's not a ton, but I feel like it's definitely gotten heavier. It seems more complete. I don't know if that makes sense, but it seems like I'm bleeding completely. In the past, I felt like it was light, and then the next period I would have, clearly, old blood.

Interviewer: (16:39) Ivy, what about you?

Ivy: It just varies so much. As I mentioned, in the past year or two, it mostly settled. When I had two periods a month, it would be like one was light and one was full blood. They were both heavy in different ways. I think the change that I've noticed is more the duration and frequency. I'm not feeling like there's a big difference in amount.

Interviewer: (17:20) What about how your bleeding looks? How has contraception changed what the blood looks like? We've heard a little bit about this. Stefani, you were talked about old verses….

Stefani: Yes. I felt like before, it was very brown, dark brown. Now, it is very much red and clots,, and again very complete. (Laughs.) I don't know how else to say it.

Interviewer: (17:51) Ivy?

Ivy: Again, it really varies. There are probably more clots and old blood since I've been on birth control. But there wasn't anything for four years. I think it's changed in both directions at points.

Interviewer: (18:18) Any others, anything to add?

Lavender: That's it (Laughter.)

Lily: I'll throw out there that, on the rare occasion where I spot, the only blood I see has been brown.

Interviewer: (18:35) Now, we want to hear how contraception has changed your menstrual cramps.

Lavender: Like I said earlier, it feels like they took everything. It took everything, it feels like, because I never have any stomach cramps. I used to have them when I would have my periods with the heavy bleeding, but everything is gone.

Interviewer: (19:02) You used to have cramps?

Lavender: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I used to complain and need something to create some relief. I would use a heatpad that makes it feel comforting. I have no need for anything. The Mirena is helping me because I was in such turmoil with all that horrible heavy bleeding with the uterine fibroids.

Interviewer: (19:41) Stefani what about you? Changes to cramps.

Stefani: I think when I go on birth control, when I've been on birth control, my cramps have been worse and very regular. When I was off of it, I would just get breast tenderness. Now, I can tell. It's also not just in my uterus. It feels like it's in my vagina or cervix cramping or something like that, which I hadn't had until, I think, a year or so ago. I get bloating. I also have an ovarian cyst that had ruptured and now I

think it's back, because just my left ovary feels like it's cramping along with everything else the week before my period. During my period, the cramping is not bad. It's the week before.

Interviewer: (20:40) What about you, Ivy?

Ivy: You know, I don't really have cramping. I notice in my body, I can tell there's discomfort, I would say, and maybe very, very slight cramping. But I don't really have cramps. Before, I did have cramps, definitely, but they weren't that bad either. I think it went from noticeable, but not extreme cramps to basically no cramps.

Interviewer: (21:17) Lily, what about you?

Lily: I didn't experience a lot of menstrual cramps in anticipation of or during my period. I would experience stomach pain, but it was after gastrointestinal in the day or two before. Now, I experience none of that. Very rarely, I'm talking maybe once every six months to a year, I'll just have some random uterine cramps. I don't know what it's from. And I usually will be spotting at that point, too. I'd have to do a lot more thinking to see if I could pinpoint an actual cause or catalyst. But in short, I have some cramping now that I didn't have before, but it's super rare.

Interviewer: (21:57) While you have been sharing your experiences, [notetaker names] have been noting them down on cards to help us remember. They're going to come over and put them on the wall. Then, we'll review and talk about them. [notetakers put up cards22:12-22:25] First, we talked about how often. We heard: "less often", "period went away", "less often", "no period for three months", "no bleeding for a while", "not present", and "less often". **Then we talked about how regular. We heard:** "twice a month", "nothing for months", "no bleeding", "it disappeared", "very regular when it starts and how long it lasts", "on schedule", "went away", and "irregular". **When we talked about how long, we heard**: "not long", "zero days", "ever-increasing", "very long", "shorter now", "three to four days", and "no bleeding". **When we talked about how much, we heard:** "three to four days", "occasional spotting", "variable", "heavier", "same amount", "heavy", "none", and "lighter". **Then, how the blood looks**: "when spotting it does look brown", "never see it", "more old blood", "more clots", "notices clots", and "looks red". **Finally, for menstrual cramps:** "bloating", "worse cramps", "uterus and vagina", "ovarian cysts", "GI or stomach pain", "use heat", "no more cramps", "slight cramps", and "discomfort". **Anything to add to any of this? I'll give you a moment to take it in, but things that we missed or anything that you'd want to add in any of these categories?** (No audible response.) **(24:23) Looks good?** (No audible response.) **Okay. (24:26) Now, how have all of these changes impacted how your body feels, changes to how your body feels? Lily?**

Lily: I look forward to not having monthly GI distress for a day or two. That's nice. It's not really dramatic, but that was always my cue that like, "My period must be coming in two days," because I had "period poohs", are what I called them. I don't have to deal with that anymore. I like that. That's nice.

Interviewer: (25:06) Other changes to how your body feels?

Ivy: It's made me feel pretty out of touch with my body because it's so unpredictable. I've noticed I'm having a lot of sleep disruption around my period. I think it's related. I don't know for sure. There's just all sort of…. It just seems to me that there's a lot of random and dramatic change with my period on this birth control, makes it hard for me to feel like I know what's going on in my body.

Interviewer: Thanks, Ivy

Stefani: Because of the scheduling, having had my period always be so irregular, I feel a little bit the opposite, where I feel like, "Cool, I know what to expect. I know what's coming." I feel like I can be comfortable with what I'm expecting with my period. At the same time, with the cramping and the bloating having gotten worse, it makes me feel uncomfortable in my body, and I think a bit of body image expectation have heightened since. I go to the gym a lot and I work out. There are certain things that I can't do when I'm cramping or when I am on my period because of that. I'll push through, but at the end of the day, it's really uncomfortable.

Interviewer: (26:47) Thanks, Stefani. Lavender, what about you? How have these changes made your body feel?

Lavender: At peace. I don't have to be in pain, worrying if I bled on someone's chair or seat, back and forth to the emergency room countless times, bleeding out (27:19 unclear/muffling) looking like (27:21 unclear/muffling). My life is just… smooth.

Interviewer: (27:31) Anything else? We've heard things like "at peace", "changes to sleep". Anything around energy or emotions, anything to add?

Stefani: Emotions. I used to get really emotional. That could also have been that I was a teenager and stuff. Around my period, and now more so, it's chill. I feel more level throughout my menstrual cycle. What was the other thing you said, not emotions?

Interviewer: (28:03) Energy.

Stefani: I do feel lower energy, and I do feel the need to eat more. I can very much notice that change throughout the month.

Lily: I'll throw out there that there are some other side effects that come along with my IUD that I like a lot. It's been so long since I have been on it, but I believe it's been very good for my skin. I had some chronic issues with that as a young person. As opposed to the birth control I was on in my early 20s, which was that progesterone-only pill, I think that caused a lot of weight gain for me. As soon as I got off of that and transitioned to an IUD, that faded a little bit. That felt better for me. It was just something that— It wasn't my favorite thing. I don't even think I really noticed it until I was off that pill. That was nice.

Interviewer: (28:59) Ivy, I think….

Ivy: Yeah. How I know my period is going to come is, I have a totally sleepless night, like anxiety. Then, I know it's going to come in a week. Once I figured that out, it's been easier to deal with that. I don't remember that happening before. So, it's like an emotional warning, more than a physical warning.

Lily or Stefani: Kind of a brutal warning…(29:34 Unclear/crosstalk.)

Interviewer: (29:38) Finally, how have all of these changes impacted your day-to-day life?

Stefani: Like what you were talking about, knowing what to expect has made things a little bit easier. I know how to prepare for certain things. I know when my period is coming, I can't—or shouldn't do certain things, or certain things might be more uncomfortable, so maybe I shouldn't do certain activities. I will say, speaking to your point about acne, I started taking birth control for acne. Since being on this new— Two years I've been taking it, my acne is regularly bad. I know when it gets worse, I'm like, "I'm getting my period," but the whole point of me taking it is for my acne. I think, day-to-day, there is a bit of

self-consciousness or image issues regarding that, and also changing my skincare routine to accommodate certain times.

Interviewer: (30:39) Can you say a little bit more about things that you do or avoid doing when you're on your period?

Stefani: Yes. I mentioned, being in the gym, certain exercises, specifically one where I'll do hip thrusts. I'll put a barbell along my pelvis. Those times, it's really uncomfortable, or doing squats. That motion of going up and down, using my glutes or my hips, is really uncomfortable. Certain stretches are just uncomfortable, or sleeping certain ways, with the vaginal cramping along with uterine cramping. There was a night when I woke up and I had to find the correct position to stop the cramping or find (31:27 unclear/muffling) this discomfort.

Interviewer: (31:30) Other things on how this has changed your day-to-day life? Lavender?

Lavender: Like I said earlier, peace. I don't have to experience the crying pains and the feeling like my insides are about to fall out. I'm just thankful for this Mirena.

Interviewer: (32:03) Are there things that you feel like you can do more freely now that you felt you couldn't?

Lavender: Yes. It seems like my body is just able to do anything that I want to do. I have been experiencing a lot of areas where I may have had trouble in the past. I'm like, "This is better. This is better. This is better." (listing out things) I don't know if it's several different things that's making it better, or I'm just looking over my past and I'm like, "I remember I used to go to the ER all the time for that for this and for this." Now, all those things are better. People are like, "Can you say what has made those things better?" I'm like, "I can't put an exact thing on it, but I know the Mirena isn't part of that problem, took care of that problem." Maybe changing my diet in some ways because I know that helps a lot of things, and maybe being more physically active. That helps a lot of things.

Interviewer: (33:53) Less having to get less healthcare?

Lavender: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: (33:58) Are there any other ways that you can say what those problems are that have changed, thinking around work or relationships, just anything? Go ahead.

Lavender: Like I said, the Mirena, it took away—I feel like that was a big part of the woman issues. Because when I talk to my gyn, I'm able to tell her that all those problems I was experiencing, that were sending me back and forth to the ER, are now gone. That was a big complaint. That's all I talked about. That's all I complained about. I felt like my life was at risk. It was! Because I needed a four-pint blood transfusion. That's tragic. Who needs a four-pint blood transfusion for something your body is supposed to expereience? Now that I don't have to experience any of those things. To whoever created Mirena, thank you! (laughs.)

Lily: You should be getting paid every time you drop that name. (Laughter.)

Interviewer: (35:32) What about over here? How has it impacted your day-to-day life?

Lily: A lot of the impacts are small conveniences and niceties. I shamelessly and freely have white linen bedsheets. I am the only woman in my life who does that. I don't have to purchase and stock menstrual

products. That's just a little thing, but at the end of the day, we have all been out of tampons before. That really sucks when you need one. That's just not something I worry about. It's made it more convenient with partners. That's not something I need to—I don't ever need to think about it at all. It's just completely left my brain as something that I would need to just throw a quick flag up about. Also, with some of the activities I like to do, I've never actually had to make a lot of considerations that other women in my life have. I like backpacking. I like taking long, full, day-long trips outdoors. I don't need to consider how I'm going to handle using menstrual products. When and where am I going to have a place to exchange them, if I can change them out if I need to? That's been wildly convenient. I've never known a world where I had to because it's been the better part of a decade since I've had to deal with it, but that's been very convenient. Overall, I'm very pleased with the changes to my period. By not having one, that's really made my day-to-day life easier in mostly small, medium sized ways. (37:04 Unclear/muffling.)

Interviewer: (37:04) Ivy, what about you?

Ivy: I'm struggling to answer this question a little bit. In general, I am really happy with my birth control. It is uncomfortable, obviously, to have my period for long and unpredictable points. Mostly in that I feel like I'm always getting stains on my clothes, and I have no… idea—I think the uncomfortable part, besides the stains, is also— This seems like it keeps changing. It could get worse. It could get more uncomfortable or more inconvenient. I think the negative effect that I feel the most is lack of sleep. That just makes it hard to focus at work and makes me kind of depressed, I think. I also really believe that it works. I believe it is less anxiety overall that I'm not worried that I'm pregnant. This product does feel miraculous to me in that. I think it's like I don't have to remember to take anything. The implantation process was not so comfortable, but it's not— I've tried to get an IUD before and that was too uncomfortable for me. I feel happy with it, overall.

Interviewer: (38:50) Once again, while you're been sharing, [notetaker names] have been noting that we've got on cards to help us remember. Take a moment to review. We talked about how the changes make your body feel. We heard: "uncomfortable in body", "dealt with cramping", "out of touch with body", "unpredictable", "at peace", "know what to expect", "don't have the monthly GI distress", "emotional warning", "insomnia before a period", "less leaking", "good for skin", "hungry", "lower energy", "level", "smooth", "not worried", and "sleep disruption". **Then for impact on life:** "provides peace", and "body can do anything I want to do", "impacts sleeping position to avoid cramping", "avoid certain workouts while on period", "knowing what to expect makes it easier to plan activities", "provides a schedule to know when to expect", "relieving to know there's no need to deal with period symptoms", "less concern about pregnancy", "impacts sleep, "making it difficult to focus at work", "uncomfortable in some ways", "stains on clothing", "easier on day-to-day life", "better for sex life", "able to backpack and take long trips outside", "decrease bleeding", "less visits to the ER" and "less need for healthcare", and then "more convenience like white bed sheets and "now more menstrual products". **Anything to add to either how your body feels or the impact on your life?**

Lavender: I feel safe.

Interviewer: (40:58) Safe?

Lavender: Mm-hmm (affirmative). The Mirena makes me feel safe.

Lily: I'll also throw out there that it's made things easier on my partners, knowing that I know I'm on an IUD, like implanted, in-body, as opposed to something that I need to take day-to-day. Not that any of

my partners don't trust me, but that's something off of their shoulders, to know that it's fully taken care of.

Interviewer: (41:28) Any final thoughts? (No audible response.) **(41:32) We're going to leave these up here, but we're going to move on to the wall here. We're going to do another activity over here. We have these pictures of the body, both front and back. We're going to use them to show us about your experiences with menstrual cramping while using contraception. We're going to give you stickers and ask you to put them on the posters, anywhere on the body, front and back, where you have felt menstrual cramping while using contraception. The stickers are different colors for each different method of contraception. First, let's have people who are using pills, or have used them in the past, come get a yellow sticker and place them anywhere on the body where you have menstrual cramping.**

Lily: If we've been on pills in the past and experienced none, do you still want that indicated up there in some way?

(No audible response.)

Interviewer: (42:43) The next color is for injections. Green sticker, you're using injections, or have used them in the past and have experienced menstrual cramping. The next is implants. That's Nexplanon, blue, so anywhere on the body, front and back, where you have experienced cramping. You can take it from any sticker as you like. The next one is the non-hormonal or copper IUD, anyone who used copper IUD in the past. And then a hormonal IUD, like the Mirena, anywhere that you feel cramps.

Lavender: What if you don't really have cramping?

Interviewer: (43:58) Anytime while on contraception.

Lavender: It's not something I really experience.

Interviewer: (44:15) Okay, okay, then yeah. If any other hormonal methods, like NuvaRing or something that you've used in the past. Not a ton of cramping… We have one more sticker, which is a gold star. For those who put stickers up there, put a gold star in the place where the cramping bothered you the most.

Lavender: Maybe (44:53 unclear/muffling)?

Interviewer: (44:56) Yes, you can add that.

Ivy: I only have one sticker.

Stefani: (45:04 Unclear/crosstalk.)

Lily: (45:06 Unclear/muffling.)

Interviewer: (45:07) Wherever it bothers you the most.

Lily: How about not bother?

Interviewer: (45:11) That's the blue and those here.

Lily: (45:12 Unclear/muffling) about it's super rare. It technically happens.

Lavender: (45:20 Unclear/muffling.)

Interviewer: (45:31) Anything to add? (No audible response.) (**45:32) We're all good with that, and then we'll talk about it. I see some stickers in this area. First question: Do we want to call this all the same area or is there a difference higher and lower?**

Ivy: I should be specific. My red one is super low, definitely uterus, my uterus.

Stefani: I'd say the yellow one, up above, feels like ovary.

Interviewer: (46:03) Let's start here. Let's start here. What are some words we've used to label this part of the body? We've heard ovary.

Lily: Lower abdominal.

Lavender: That second star below, what I said earlier, it makes me feel like my uterus is going to fall out. I had a lot of pressure, and it feels heavy. I've never been pregnant, but it just feels like everything is going to drop.

Interviewer: (46:54) We heard "heavy", "pressure", "uterus is going to fall out". Anyone else who has stickers that they want to talk a little bit about your experience with cramps in those areas? Ivy?

Ivy: It feels really internal. I don't know that I have the awareness to say what organs I feel like it is, but it feels like I'm really aware that there are organs impacted.

Interviewer: (47:23) Others? Stefani?

Stefani: I'd say I feel like I've experienced uterine cramping, which to me is more on my pelvic bone here. The pain I get is sharp cramping on either side, right below my hip bone. It feels like this intermittent, in-and-out, dull and then sharp pain, and then dull again.

Lavender: Throbbing.

Stefani: Yes.

Lavender: Mine is just like that.

Interviewer: (47:57) For those who have gold stars here, can you tell me a little bit about why that bothers you the most?

Stefani: I've never really felt pain like it. I've had multiple occasions, and one of those occasions, supposedly an ovarian cyst had ruptured. I was keeled over. I couldn't lift up my torso. There are moments where I'll be doing something and I'll feel it. I'm just like, "Oh." Even right now, I feel a slight pain. It's also scary because it's not like a uterine cramp that I have normally felt. I think that's also what makes it so uncomfortable is, "Is it another cyst? Is it going to rupture again? I don't want to feel that same pain."

Interviewer: (48:47) How about the other gold star? Why does this bother you the most?

Lavender: Probably because my period were not normal. I was having something else more heavier. Lots of different fibroids in my uterus. And it was tearing me up.

Interviewer: (49:21) Moving on to this area of the body, what words would we use to call this?

Lily or Ivy: How about vaginal, right?

Stefani: Yes, pelvic floor or cervix.

Interviewer: (49:35) Somebody put a sticker here. Do you want to tell me about your experience cramping here?

Stefani: It's becoming cramping where, if I sit with my legs crossed, or if I have my legs in a certain way, it gets worse. I've had times where I've had sex and it's like something happened and it just started cramping, to the point where it was so painful that I couldn't sit a certain way. It lasted a long time.

Interviewer: (50:14) Back of the body, what are some words that you'd use to describe this area?

Ivy: I mean… butt. I don't know. This is gross, but I felt like my anus was being pulled deeper inside me. Very, very painful…

Interviewer: (50:41) Does someone want to say more about your experience with cramping in this area?

Ivy: Yes, it seemed connected to the lower abdominal cramp, but it was heightened. That was the really painful part, that I felt like there was compression from both sides.

Interviewer: (51:02) The gold star, why this area? What bothers you the most?

Ivy: I think the pain was just sharper or harder to… I felt like, when there was cramping in my lower abdominal area, I could do a stretch or a backbend to feel a little better. That, I was just like, "There's nothing I can do about this."

Interviewer: (51:31) How do you manage menstrual cramping, or how have you managed it in the past? Lily?

Lily: The infrequent menstrual cramping that I experience right now, I don't need to even do anything. It's just so mild, it frequently just goes away on its own really quickly.

Ivy: Just Advil and also stretching.

Stefani: I'd probably say ibuprofen or Tylenol, and then heat pads, for sure.

Interviewer: (52:07) Lavender?

Lavender: Yes, I would use my heat pad.

Interviewer: (52:13) We've gone over this quite a bit so far. Just briefly, have you had less or reduced cramping and pain while using contraception? Lavender, definitely yes.

Stefanie: More

Interviewer: More from Sefani.

Ivy: I think less.

Interviewer: (52:33) Lily?

Lily: GI type of cramping, completely less, uterine cramping, technically more, but it's so super minimal.

Interviewer: (52:43) We're going to leave the body mapping here, but we'll leave this up. For the next few questions, I want you to look back on all of the ways contraception has changed your menstrual cycles that we have talked about here on our wall, all the places where cramping has impacted you, and think about what information did you get from the clinic or a healthcare provider about changes to your menstrual cycle before you started using the method that you are currently using? Knowing that you've reported all of these kinds of changes and these experiences, what information did you get?

Lavender: That my periods would be a lot lighter.

Interviewer: (53:27) Any other information?

Lavender: That my fibroids could shrink over time because of them not receiving my blood like vampires. (Laughter.)

Interviewer: (53:46) Others' information that you got? Stefani?

Stefani: Definitely addressing my issues at the time, they were very like, "This could, potentially, put your period on track." "It could help with acne," even though it hasn't really. Basically making my periods more regular. They also mentioned weight gain as a potential side effect, but I haven't experienced that. Nothing about cramping, more or less.

Interviewer: (54:19) Was that information helpful?

Stefani: I think it addressed my issues at the time. Because I didn't have issues with cramping, I feel like that wasn't as much a part of the conversation. So, I would say the information they gave me was helpful. I did experience benefits in those ways, but there was probably more information I wish I could've gotten, or at least if I don't remember it, it must not have been that impactful. I don't know.

Interviewer: (54:44) Can you say more about the information you would've wanted?

Stefani: Yes, I would probably say informational, like cramping discomforts, maybe how it could affect. I was diagnosed with endometriosis when I had this first deep pain in college, in my uterus, that area. They also identified an ovarian cyst at that time as well. I wish there would have been more conversation about how contraception could impact that, if it can at all, or if there was any data on that. I wish I would've had that conversation because I didn't realize how more severe it would make pains that I attribute to that.

Interviewer: (55:32) Over here, Ivy, any thoughts on information?

Ivy: Yes. I think the discussion around what kind of birth control… I knew I wanted to be on birth control. I have a very… I wouldn't even really call it…I guess it's a blood condition, but there was a limiting factor for the kinds of birth control I could be on. It was either Nexplanon or IUD. That's what my doctor told me. That was our conversation. That made it so that there no… There wasn't a discussion of what was going to change, other than, "This is a form of birth control that I can stick to."

Interviewer: (56:25) Lily?

Lily: When I transitioned from being on the progestin-only pill to an IUD, I had a conversation with my doctor about how the pill wasn't working for me, mostly because if you're off by a few hours on that pill, you have two days to get back on track before it's effective again. We were exploring ways that wouldn't

put me at risk of needing to get back on track or something. The IUD, for its convenience, was the option. We did discuss the difference in copper and hormonal. We talked about how a copper one would likely increase my period flow, like the amount of blood I'd experienced. Then, an IUD would likely taper it down. I don't recall them telling me that they would go away, but again it seemed like (57:14 unclear/muffling).

Interviewer: (57:16) Was that information helpful?

Lily: Yes, it influenced me choosing the hormonal as opposed to copper.

Interviewer: (57:23) Yes, Lavender?

Lavender: I had a discussion about what contraceptives I could not take because I have a lupus diagnosis. They said certain things you cannot take with lupus.

Interviewer: (57:38) For lupus, yes. Is there information that you wish you had gotten before starting? We talked about this a little bit, but anything that you wish providers had told you about the changes, or in general?

Lily: I wish that, before I started on that progestin-only pill, that they told me a little bit more about what to expect from side effects of that one. Retroactively, I think I experienced pretty much all the side effects they told me I would, plus a few more, that I only really noticed once I stopped experiencing them in transitioning to an IUD, which I'm on currently (58:19 unclear/muffling).

Interviewer: (58:22) Others?

Ivy: I think it would have been appropriate to discuss changes to my period. They must have said something because I don't think I was entirely surprised when my period totally stopped after that. My sense of reading about the Nexplanon or online communities and people who have it, talking about it, I think there's a huge amount of variation in how people experience it, and even in how I've experienced it over the roughly nine years I've had it. I don't think I was missing information because I think no one really could've known what it was going to be like.

Interviewer: (59:19) Stefani?

Stefani: I think I agree with that. Going off and then going back on the same birth control, and then seeing the stark difference in how my period was… This was before I was on the birth control I'm on now. Then, going on this birth control, I just feel like, yes, there is so much variation in experiencing things. Also, there could be so many confounding variables as to why this changed and why this didn't. I think the only information I wish I could know more about, which I don't know if it even exists, is just how certain things interact with one another, and how birth control— What symptoms it can cause based on your preexisting issues. It sounds like some conversations were had about that.

Interviewer: (60:08) What's the most important information, or one thing, that you would want a friend to know about these changes before starting?

Stefani: It just depends on their goals, to be completely honest. My physician centered a lot of our conversation around what my goals were at the time, and what my concerns were. If I had concerns about weight gain, they were trying to find a medication that wasn't going to be as likely to do that.

Interviewer: (60:40) Others?

Lily: I think I would probably want my friends to know that, when they say it'll go, your period might fully go away. I do know some people who are uncomfortable with that, and that's very fair. I think being explicit about, "It will fully go away. You won't even know it's there anymore," for some people that would be very good and for some it will be a nonstarter.

Interviewer: (61:04) Lavender?

Lavender: If you—when it comes time to have it removed, And a new one, when it's replaced, it really hurts to remove it.

Lily: Just for the sake of diverse experience with it, I will say removal is actually unnoticeable for me. Insertion is never my favorite part, but with the removal when they change out, my doctor does tell me to cough. And during the cough, they'll extract it. I truly won't even know it is happening. The actual replacement, that is challenging.

Lavender: Also, mine may have hurt more because it was trapped up inside. I will share with someone that it can get stuck, and it can travel. They have to, like "Hey, where are you?". (Laughter.)

Interviewer: (62:11) Ivy, what's one thing that you would want a friend to know?

Ivy: This is almost taking it in another direction. Last time I got it replaced, I was told by my healthcare provider that I could have it for five years. I did some more research on my own, and the efficacy really drops off after the third year. It becomes like… What I like about the Nexplanon is it is so effective. I have read it is more effective than tubal ligation. I don't know if that's right, but that's the information I have. I was under a lot of pressure to not get it replaced. I even felt a change, like I felt returning to this sort of pre-Nexplanon state after that third year. I just felt very different, hormonally. I think, advocate for yourself, and do get it replaced after that third you because I don't see the point. I don't see why not.

Interviewer: (63:28) We're cruising along. We have one more activity to do. For this final activity, we're going to talk about two questions that healthcare providers or researchers sometimes ask people about their menstrual cycles. I'm going to ask you each this question and we'll take a few minutes after to discuss. When you last had a period, would you describe it as light, moderate, or heavy? Raise your hand if you would say, "Light." Lily. Raise your hand if you would say, "Heavy." No one. Then, moderate? Ivy, Stefani, and Lavender all said moderate, so we'll split light and moderate. How did you decide on your answer, Lily?

Lily: I remembered back to the last time I was having periods. That was right when I got on my first IUD. It would have been tapering, tapering into nothing. The last time I had a period, it would've only been a few days, much lighter flow than my normal, which I would describe as kind of textbook. It seemed to fit the middle of all of the categories.

Interviewer: (65:04) Those who said moderate, how did you decide on your answer?

Stefani: I would be "moderate to heavy", but I think that's relative to what I had before. I would say it's nothing heavy, like going through clothes or anything like that. It's just more than I've experienced.

Interviewer: (65:28) Anyone else who said moderate?

Lavender: I think I said moderate because that's been my experience. Heavy had been my experience. Getting me to a point where I'm not always feeling scared, like something heavy is going to come out,

has been a long, long, long, long, long road. I think my last situation was moderate. They were very urgently needing to get the Mirena in.

Interviewer: (66:42) How long ago was the period you were thinking about when you answered this question? Raise your hand if it was within the last month or two. Ivy and Stefani. About three to six months ago? More than six months ago? Lily and Lavender. Is there anything about that question that made it difficult to answer?

Ivy: I feel like the options being light, moderate, or heavy made me think the question was about the amount of blood. There is always, for me, a light amount of blood. Almost always, that's my experience. I wouldn't really say I'm having a light period if it lasts for three weeks. Moderate seem like, "That's normal." It's not normal. It's just strange on a couple of different axes.

Interviewer: (67:50) What about others? Lily?

Lily: I would say that I don't like the subjectivity of the answers there. It implies either that I have a firm grasp on the average experience of every person who menstruates on the planet, or that we're talking about moderate/heavy based on my immediate experience, and my practitioner doesn't know what that baseline is for me). I think we're not actually attributing anything concrete when we describe it like this.

Stefani: I agree with that. I think it would make more sense to have that baseline and then, going forward, "What is your period this time?" If it's changed and knowing that change, but it is so subjective. There's more nuance to it than just those three things.

Interviewer: (68:38) With these two groups in mind, light and moderate, we're going to ask one more question that healthcare providers and researchers sometimes ask. On the heaviest day of your last period, how many menstrual pads, tampons, or other materials did you need to use to collect or absorb your bleeding for that day? Please raise your hands if you've used one. Ivy, Stefani, Lily… sort of, sort of.

Lily: I don't know. Maybe one or two.

Interviewer: (69:18) Lavender?

Lavender: It wasn't a normal pad. It was a Poise pad.

Interviewer: (69:25) We're going to talk about this. First off, just the question as it is, one. Everyone said one on the heaviest day of your last period.

Stefani: Yes.

Interviewer: (69:41) Was there anything about that question that is difficult to answer? Lily, let's hear what you're thinking about that.

Lily: Firstly, I have no memory of a decade ago, not a clue. I think the question is implying, "In your period, what does your heaviest day look like?" My last period was me tapering down to no periods ever again. That's not an example of what a normal cycle would be, and it was so long ago that, I'm sure if I were experiencing periods right now, there's no guarantee that it would be the same. This is really trying to gauge something about the way my body functions menstrually. I don't think it's a very effective question.

Interviewer: (70:20) Others?

Stefani: I think there's just a lot of nuance. (crosstalk between study team)

Interviewer: (70:44) Sorry, Stefani. Can you say that again?

Stefani: There's just a lot of nuance, like Lavender said. Did I use a light tampon? Did I use a super plus? Did I use a Poise pad? Did I use a regular pad, a pantyliner? There's just a lot of…

Interviewer: (71:05) Lavender, you mentioned you used…

Lavender: Yes, I used the Poise pad. They are much bigger than….

Interviewer: (71:17) Any other thoughts on this question, why it might be difficult to answer?

Ivy: I go back and forth about this. I've been uncomfortable—I've read studies that there's lead in tampons. I'm trying hard not to use tampons and pads when it's not strictly necessary. Sometimes, that looks like a menstrual cup. That's hard to measure. As much as possible, I just try to not involve— like just free bleed, I guess, if I'm at home and can figure out a way to do that. I just think that's a risk I don't want to take.

Interviewer: (72:08) Lily?

Lily: I wanted to throw out there, I missed this wave because I don't have periods. But I know a lot of women who, they've all made that shift to menstrual cups. I think this question—it seems to be generational, too. A lot of young women don't want to buy a single-use product, is what they really don't want to do. They're using one product no matter what. We lose a lot of information if this is how it's gauged.

Ivy: One more thing I would add is, the issue with my periods, as I keep saying, is not the amount of blood, it's the length of time. To answer this question, if this was the only other question being asked to assess if there was something uncomfortable happening, I don't think the way my periods are uncomfortable will be captured accurately in this question.

Interviewer: (73:10) Sometimes people have a very small amount of bleeding. They may not even need to use any menstrual pad, or tampon, or pantyliner at all, as we've been talking about. What words do you use to describe that kind of bleeding?

Stefani: Spotting.

Ivy: To me, it's all "my period" because I never know what's coming next.

Lily: I'll say I use "spotting" to differentiate between super light bleeding that I would've felt on a period, and bleeding that feels like unrelated to a period.

Interviewer: (73:44) That was my next question. What is spotting to you? How do you know when you have this type of bleeding?

Lily: For me, it's pretty straightforward because I don't experience a monthly bleed. So, anytime that I'm seeing any blood, it is some degree of just spotting.

NOTE: DID NOT REVISE TRANSCRIPT FROM HERE ONWARD

Interviewer: (74:02) We are coming to the end of our time here. I just have a couple more questions. You've been very helpful in answering these questions. This next short section talks

about sex and sexual relationships. I just want to restate what I said at the beginning, which is, we acknowledge that this can be sensitive and uncomfortable, especially amongst people whom we don't know very well. You don't need to share anything. You can skip this altogether. We have two more things that healthcare providers sometimes ask people. We want to get your opinion. Sometimes, healthcare providers or researchers want to know whether or not you have had sex recently. For some people, this is sensitive and may be hard to talk about. How would you like to be asked if you had sex or not, or any reactions to that question, "Have you had sex recently?" Any thoughts?

Lavender: "Are you sexually active?"

Interviewer: (74:59) "Are you sexually active," and then not consider the "recently" part?

Lavender: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Then, maybe the next question, "Have you had sex recently?"

Interviewer: (75:20) Others? Yes, Lily?

Lily: I'd like a blurb about what information they're really looking for. Give me a one-sentence, "We have found that when people have X, Y, Z type of sex, X, Y, Z are things that we're looking for." That might change my answer. Even if I'm sexually active, I might be engaging in sex acts that really don't have to have anything to do with the information the doctor is looking for. I could say, "Yes," to I've had sex recently, but if what they're really looking for is, "Have you had heterosexual, penetrative sex," that's a very different question and could have (75:53 unclear/mumbling).

Ivy: I was going to say something along those same lines. I think understanding why this is relevant, understanding what they count as sex… I think it could turn into a more uncomfortable question if they go into really graphic detail about what kind of sex they're talking about, or what counts as sex. I think just bringing everyone into the "why", I think is respectful.

Lavender: It's really easy for me to have that question because if you're not having sex, they're like, "(76:53 Unclear/Why aren't you having sex?" I'm good?).

Interviewer: (77:02) Healthcare providers or researchers sometimes ask whether or not you've used a second method of contraception when you last had sex. How do you think it's best to ask this question, or reactions to that question: second method?

Lily: I'd like a little more info also. I have two partners with whom I'll have sex with. One of them has had a vasectomy and the other one has not. Is that a yes? I don't really know. I'll give them that and I don't really know what they write down. I don't (77:34 unclear/mumbling).

Ivy: This is where I feel I almost embarrass myself the most because I'm trying to guess, "Pull-out method?"

Stefani: That's not the same.

Ivy: Yes, is pull-out method a second method of birth control? I think 99 percent of the time, I'm like, "No, because I'm on this Nexplanon." That's my understanding of why I'm on this birth control is because I don't need one. I think the question makes me nervous sometimes because I'm like, "Are you implying that I should be on one, or using one, or something?" I think it's hard to answer that question without getting into the details of exactly how you're having sex and who you're having sex with. I'm fine talking. I'm not very easily embarrassed talking about sex, I think, but I don't think that's a realistic

expectation for a doctor-patient relationship, that people won't be embarrassed.

Interviewer: (78:54) Any final thoughts on this question?

Lavender: What was the question?

Interviewer: (78:58) This is the one about a second method of contraception.

Lavender: No.

NOTE: REVISED REST OF TRANSCRIPT

Interviewer: (79:10) Coming to the very end here… Before we end, is there anything else you think that we should know about your experiences with your menstrual cycle while taking contraception that we did not talk about yet today?

Lily: Maybe something from a doctor that would really be helpful to know—I think we don't know this info yet—about the potential long-term effects of not menstruating. I haven't menstruated for the better part of a decade. Is there something about that, that I should know down the line should I ever want to utilize that menstruation in another few years?

Lavender: I did read online that, since that's what the woman's body is supposed to do, as a way to detox and things like that. Long term, that can cause (80:22 unclear) possibly with women's bodies because your body is supposed to release those toxins and things.

Interviewer: (80:35) Anything else that we haven't talked about that you want to add?

Ivy: No, I think my experience was well-captured.

Interviewer: (80:46) Thank you all for joining our discussion today. We are very grateful that you have spent your time and your lunch hour to join us, to share your thoughts, experience, and opinions. This information will be very helpful. I'm going to stop the recording. Today is September 10, 2025 at 12:52 p.m. This is focus group 3005.

(End of audio.)