F: Today is August 26, 2025. It is 5:59 p.m. and this is focus group 30-01. So, before we begin, I would like to help our minds think creatively and openly. Because we're not sharing our names with personal information, I have one short question just to help us get to know each other a little bit, and that is: What animal do you relate to? And why did you select this animal? So, tonight, I'm going to say an owl because they are quiet, observant, and they like it when it's dark out. Anyone else want to share? Yes, Emma?

Emma: A hummingbird. A little bit frantic and a little bit of attitude (laughs).

F: I like that. Taylor.

Taylor: I will say a cat. Sometimes I really wanna be left alone. Sometimes I wanna cuddle with people, but it's, like, on my terms and when I'm in the mood for it (laughs).

F: Thanks for sharing

Lily: A panda bear. Because sometimes I make some choices that make me fall down the stairs, but I'm still getting right back up.

F: Thanks, Lily.

Dawn: Gotta go with domestic cat. I'm curious, and sometimes rambunctious and playful; sometimes, "Get the hell out my back". [*laughs*] But lovable [l*aughs*].

Sam: I would say an elephant. I cannot tell you why. It's just my favorite animal. They're really loving. I guess that's really why.

F: Thanks, Sam. Ivy?

Ivy: I was also going to go with "elephant". They're very communal and really take care of one another, so I identify with that. They are also my favorite animal as well.

F: Great. Well, thank you. We're very happy you are part of this discussion. Let's begin. So, now for the rest of the discussion today, we will talk about menstrual cycles. People sometimes use different words when talking about the menstrual cycles or the days of the month when they are bleeding. What are some of the words that you use?

Sam: Period.

F: Period? Thanks, Sam.

Taylor: Girly time.

F: Thank you, Taylor.

Dawn: Aunt Flow.

F: Dawn, yeah. Anyone else?

Lily: The week of which I murder small animals. [*laughs; Others laugh*]

F: Thanks, Lily. [*Pause*] Anything else on that one? [*Pause*] What about, like, just other things that people say? Not necessarily that you might say, but like other things, other ways people talk about periods or menstrual cycles.

Dawn: Menses.

F: Menses. Thanks, Dawn.

Lily: I've heard "on the rag". [Others: The rag. [*agreeing*]]

Ivy: The red tide.

F: Thanks, Ivy.

Taylor: Your time of the month. [*others agreeing*]

F: There you go, Taylor. [*Pause*] Alright, great. How do people usually keep track of their menstrual cycles to help know when they might start bleeding the next time? Anyone want to share either what you do or what you've known people to do? Lily?

Lily: For me, I take birth control pills, so the pills will tell me when I'm getting close.

F: Okay.

Taylor: When I remember, I try to put it in my calendar. But I don't always remember, so that's not the best way to do it. [*chuckles*]

F: Yeah. Thanks, Taylor.

Sam: I actually [*clears throat*] can tell by the people around me, other women typically, who are menstruating. Our cycles will tend to sync up. So, if I can't remember, which is usually not the case, but if someone else's is around mine or comes up, and they tell me, I'm like, "Oh, mine's coming too," or like my mom is... She knows my cycle better than me sometimes. [*others chuckle*] So, she'll be like, "Oh, your time of the month is coming up soon". Those types of things.

F: Thanks for sharing that, Sam.

Ivy: I've known people to use apps. [*other agrees*]

F: Yup. Thanks, Ivy. All right, so we all have the same understanding for the rest of the discussion, when I say menstrual cycle, I'm talking about the monthly cycles that women, or people who menstruate, usually have. So, this includes the days of the month when you are bleeding, the time just before you bleed, the time after, and other times of the month in between. That make sense?

[*Participants agree*] **Great. Okay, so now I would like you to think about how your own menstrual cycles have changed while using contraception—both changes that you like and that you don't like. So first, please tell me about any ways that contraception has changed how often you have bleeding. And I'll try and call on you for this one, if you want to just give me a hand raise. How often? Yeah, Ivy?**

Ivy: It's a lot less for me. I utilize a Mirena IUD, and initially, it was very regular. I typically would bleed five to seven days. So, that shortened to about three to five days. We're just talking *frequency*, right (laughs)? **[F: Yes.]** Then what used to happen before was I would have a very heavy cycle of bleeding. Then, the next month, it would be less heavy, so kind of, like alternating that way. Now, what happens is I often have a cycle where I don't bleed, and then I'll have a cycle where I just spot. So, a lot of when I'm actually bleeding is shorter, and then the frequency of the bleeding over the years is less.

F: Thanks for sharing that. Anyone else? How often? Yeah. Emma?

Emma: I'm also bleeding less frequently. I'm on the continuous contraceptive pill, so usually I get three packs at a time. So, I only have a period maybe three or four times a year.

F: Yeah. Lily?

Lily: Mine are more regular. Before, it was just, kind of, whenever my body felt like it, and now it's at the same time every month, assuming that I remember to take the pill everyday.

F: Yeah, Taylor?

Taylor: Fewer days. It used to be probably, like five or six days. Now it's closer to three. Sometimes even less. And, sometimes it just doesn't come, or it'll just be, like, randomly two weeks late and it'll come for a couple days, so it's actually gotten a lot less regular and shorter.

Dawn: For me, I've been on Mirena a long time. And, what used to be a little bit more like what Ivy was saying, has become almost to the point where I forget I even had menstrual cycles at one point. Its spotting is so rare that I'm just like, "It ain't nothing anymore," [*chuckles*] which is awesome (laughs). I don't have to spend money on this anymore (laughs). I used to—My periods were pretty normal. They were a little bit more—I will say, when I switched Mirenas, that's when, like, all the bleeding makes up for [*chuckles*] all that I haven't had. And last time I got the Mirena, it was pretty heavy when I got the new Mirena, and then now it's just exactly the same.

F: Great. Thanks, Dawn.

Sam: For me, my body, I would describe it as, like, dysregulated when I take birth control. And there's not really, like, a timeline. So it could be more frequently; it could be more infrequently. I can't pinpoint what or why, so it's kind of like I'm playing Russian Roulette. And my period could come any time or it could be non-existent for months.

F: Okay. Great. That's a nice segue. Next, I want you to tell me about ways contraception has changed how regularly you have bleeding. How regularly you have bleeding. So, Sam, you just mentioned Russian Roulette. Do you want to expand on that at all?

Sam: Repeat it one more time. I'm sorry.

F: It's all good. This time we're talking about how regular.

Sam: Regular? Not regular. It's so irregular. It drives me crazy because of how irregular it can be. There's no, really, prep or planning. Or, you know, you can't really tell how long it might be sometimes. Just the normal times for, you know, people letting on with their period, maybe it's heavier in the beginning and whatnot. There are not really those signs, so it's like, "Okay. Well, it's here now and we'll see."

F: Anyone else want to talk about how regularly you have bleeding changes? Yeah. Lily?

Lily: While mine's been fairly regular with the pill, which is the reason I'm on it alsoThe only regular change for me is that it doesn't always start on the same day. I have to be off the homronal placebo pills, for at least three days, but then sometimes it's like four or five days, and I've already started taking the contraceptive again, and then it starts. Sometimes it starts on day three.

F: Okay. Thank you. Taylor?

Taylor: Sometimes I'll go months where it'll be the ninth of the month and it'll come at the exact time. And then sometimes, like if I'm traveling or stressed, it seems like it just goes out the window and then it suddenly. just two weeks later, is like, "Here it is." Then sometimes it goes on a different cycle, sometimes it goes back, but it's very inconsistent when it does change.

F: Okay. Any other thoughts on regular… Ivy?

Ivy: I would say that it has varied over the years of me being on the Mirena. In the beginning, similarly to Dawn, I had that very heavy bleeding, and then it would, kind of, go away but then come back. When I initially started the contraception, it was completely unpredictable, and then I, kind of, settled into a routine. Then, I didn't have it for a really long time at all. And then—I think I'm on year seven or eight of it now—so, I think it was two years ago, I started having really random bleeding throughout, and it wasn't predictable, and now I'm regular again. There's changes in regularity over the years with the Mirena.

Dawn: That's interesting because, yeah, I've been on it consistently. I've been on Mirena consistently, so it's declined to the point of I rarely spot because I've been on it for so long, my body is just like, "Oh, this is what we're doing." It'll be bleeding for a little bit when I get a new one, which has been so rare—I've had three (laughs)—because they last so long. So that's been my experience.

F: Thanks, Dawn. Emma?

Emma: My period was actually quite irregular before I started contraceptive. Nothing too weird, like maybe you know every 28 to 45 days. Now, as long as I take the pill regularly, as you're supposed to, it's right on schedule.

F: So, now I want you to tell me about ways that contraception has changed how long you have bleeding. Emma?

Emma: I'll go again. Before, my period was very heavy for maybe three to five days, and now it's very light for like seven to 10 days. It's longer, but much lighter.

F: Yeah. Taylor?

Taylor: Mine's the opposite. Mine was longer. It's shorter. Beforehand, it used to be more days, but also I would think it was over, and then it was like, "Just kidding. It's still here." Now it's pretty short. Like when it's done, I don't have to worry about it anymore.

F: Anyone else, how long you have bleeding? Lily?

Lily: Mine depends, because it takes about three days back on the contraceptive for it to stop. So, depending on when it started, it changes in how long it is. But also, it does weird things too. Like the flow of it, depending on how long it is.

Sam: When I'm using contraception, my flow was shorter and lighter, and when I'm not, it's heavier. And… I would actually say shorter than on contraception. So, on contraception, it's about, like, five to seven days, and then when I'm not, it's about four to five days.

F: Thanks, Sam.

Ivy: So, I can just repeat what I did before, so it's in this section: that I have a shorter duration of

bleeding, so it's usually about three to five days. Whereas before, it was like five to seven.

F: Thanks, Ivy. So, what about how much you bleed? [*pause*] We covered this a bit, but heavier? Lighter?

Ivy: Far lighter.

Taylor: Still lighter. I used to buy, like, the super plus, and now sometimes I get the package where it's, like, regular/super, depending on what daty it is.

Emma: Much lighter.

F: Much lighter. Thanks, Emma.

Dawn: Very light (laughs).

F: How about how you're bleeding looks? How has contraception changed what the blood looks like? Lily?

Lily: Mine is… gooey, almost like snot consistency. And it's like clumpy. And it's really weird, and it's confusing, but I mean, yeah.

F: Any other changes to what blood looks like? Emma?

Emma: Yes, like that, and like old blood, like dark brown. And it's almost never red.

F: Dawn, do you want to…?

Dawn: Yes. When I got my new Mirena recently, because it was fairly recently, I noticed the blood didn't have that gooeyness that Lily was talking about. It was just solid blood, and it was, like, pretty dark but not that dark. Then it just went right back to the normal very, very rare spotting, and that's it. But I noticed it was a little different than what I used to actually bleed, like, like a lot. It was that viscous, you know, gooeyness, and then the darker with the, the pieces? I don't know what to say…[Others: clots?] Clots (laughs). Whatever they were….

F: Thank you for sharing that. Any other thoughts on what the blood looks like?

Sam: I make faces as I think about all the different stuff [*others laugh*] that's come out of my body over all the years. (Laughter.) And when you asked the question, it actually brought up that I've actually experienced so many different types of… [*others agreeing*] Including clops [*referring to clots*] and even some things that looked like… It might have been like eggs, kind of, coming… I'm not sure if you're familiar, or if I need to go to the doctor's. (Laughter.) I would get that for a couple of periods consistently, but I haven't gotten that in a long time. A long time. Recently, it's been really bright. And I think the words you guys may have described as "clops" It just feels like globs, you know? Like blobs [Others: clots], and it's clotted kind of together a little bit. And I've even experienced the darker crimson red and whatnot, too, where it kind of even just looks dry. I think I've probably experienced, like, everything [*laughs*] over a period of time.

F: Thanks, Sam.

Ivy: I would say for me, because it's so much lighter, it isn't as viscous; it's thinner. Generally, it's more on the spotting side, so it's more of the old blood, browner color. When I do have what I call my "heavier" cycles, which is still very light, that's a bright redder pink. But the majority of the time, it looks

like old blood, spotting, So, that's different at least.

F: Then, can you tell me about how contraception has changed your menstrual cramps? Taylor?

Taylor: I don't really get it at all anymore. The times I've had to go off, because I've lost it and have had to take some time off, it definitely comes back, and I notice it again, and I'm like, "Oh, I don't remember this feeling," (laughs).

F: Other experiences with cramps? Lily?

Lily: I don't have to take a week off of work anymore. [Others: wow.] I can work through them, [Other: I hear that] which is the whole reason I started taking it.

Dawn: It's very rare. They're rare, but I do get them... Actually, I think I just recently had a little bit of them just the other day. I will say the cramps are far less than they used to be. Not that I had the worst periods when I was just normal, but it's definitely very rare. Sometimes they're a little stronger, but even at their strongest, it's not as much as when I actually had regular periods. Again, I'm not that really like serious take-off-work kind of… I never really got that bad of them, but it's very rare.

F: Thanks, Dawn.

Emma: I would say mine were moderate before, for maybe three days, and now it's very mild for a day.

F: Thanks, Emma.

Sam: Cramping significantly decreases for me when I use contraceptives .

F: Thanks, Sam.

Ivy: I have far less cramping, almost non-existent. A little bit, sometimes I'm like, "What's that?" (Laughs) Right? Like, "I don't understand." [*others laugh*] So that's really nice. And I was probably a moderate to severe cramper beforehand. I used to also get it in my back, and I really don't at all anymore.

F: Thanks, Ivy. While you have been sharing experiences, our note-takers over here have been noting what you said on cards. And so we're going to take a minute, they're going to come over and put them up on this wall, and we'll take a moment to review. [*Pauses while notetakers put cards on the wall.*] The first question was around how often. We heard: "random", "unpredictable", "can be more or less often", "dysregulated", "rare", "fewer days bleeding", "regular frequency", "periods three to four times a year", "bleeding less frequently", "shorter bleeding time", "three to five days" and "less often". **When we talked about how regular:** "right on schedule from contraception", "rare", "spotting", "unpredictable when starting contraception, now regular", "irregular when stressed", "some months very regular", "no pattern or signs", "fairly regular, but doesn't always start on the same day", and "irregular"**. When we talked about how long, we had:** "shorter duration of bleeding", "three to five days", "shorter flow", "depends on what time contraception has started", "shorter now", "longer now", "seven to 10 days of bleeding"**. When we talked about how much,** "much lighter orless", again "lighter", "less", and then "super plus tampons to less absorbent"**. Then we talked about what the blood looks like,** "bright red", "thinner", "crimson red", "looks dry", "clots", "globs", "clotted", "bright", "looks like eggs", "clots present", "somewhat dark", "solid blood", "dark brown", "gooey like snot", "clumpy consistency", and "looks like old blood"**. Finally for cramps, we have** "less cramping, almost non-existent", "moderate before and now mild", "cramping is less intense", "cramping is rare", "don't have to take a week off of work", and "no more cramping"**. Take a moment to take this all in and think**

about what did we miss? What did you say that we missed? Or other changes, things that we didn't get up here?

Dawn: Is there any emotional stuff that counts?

F: Whatever comes to mind.

Dawn: Because as far as, like, the PMS symptoms, like emotional… Non-existent. Same with cramps, similarly with the cramps. Emotional reactiveness, like, on Mirena, my body is just like, "JK, no more periods," basically (laughs). So, anything emotional response… Sadness, like, you know, the mood, the mood thing, that's basically taken care of. Don't have that anymore.

F: We'll get into that a little deeper in a minute. Yeah. Sam?

Sam: I think, like, how much for me, I just, kind of, wanted to capture… Because over time for me, I've been on birth control for a long time, so I've had a really long time with it, and there've been some trends and then there've also been just a lot of inconsistencies or irregularities. And I wanted to note, looking at... we've talked about it to be much lighter or less, but sometimes when I would be on contraceptive, it would actually be the opposite. There were times where--- I think I was on Mirena at one point where I had to go in and have it removed because I was bleeding too much, and I was like, "I don't like this," because I was sold that it would be less bleeding. [*others agreeing*] So, I wanted to just note, as I'm seeing everything, that there were times that I would actually bleed more frequently, and that would end up making my decision to change a birth control and make different decisions.

F: Anything else? Changes to your menstrual cycle?

Taylor: One thing I just wanted to call out, and I don't know how this gets documented, but I have noticed that sometimes the pharmacy, like, changes the brand, and I don't usually know what's happening. Like, I'll just go pick it up, and sometimes it's Blisovi pills [generic for Loestrin Fe] with the Fe. And I don't know how different they are. But I also don't know if sometimes the changes that I see have to do with switching it, like if the hormones are different. So, I don't know if, like, "the pill is the pill". And I imagine there might be some changes that account for why. At times, it's been more predictable when I've been on maybe, like, one type for longer. I was on Loestrin at one point for, like, two years, and I think it was way more consistent. But I have noticed they keep switching me for some reason, and that might be why it has changed.

F: Thanks, Taylor. Anything else to add to this wall here?

Dawn: I didn't realize that I was going to talk about other types of birth controls I used to be on. I didn't even think of that, because I tried the pill, and I did not like it because I got way too much PMS. I was unstable bad. I was like, "Wow, I am like… My mood is not good," (laughs). It was always like that. The one thing I really noticed was that. And the periods, I think, were just normal because it was just the placebo pills, as far as I can recall. It was so long ago, I can barely remember, but that's the one thing I remember, is just the mood was bad. That's why I stopped (laughs), and thought "I need something else."

F: Thanks, Dawn. Now, how have all of these changes to your menstrual cycle made your body feel?

Dawn: Good (laughs), because I know that was…

F: Dawn says, “Good.”

Dawn: It’s such a relief not to have that emotional and physical thing. And I’m a very clean person, so it’s nice from, like, a cleanliness way for me.

Lily: I’d say I almost feel lighter. [Dawn: Yeah.] I’m not covered in everything. It just feels lighter. I’m not cramping.

Dawn: Exactly.

F: Thanks, Lily. Other changes to the way that your body feels before or after contraception?

Taylor: I would say, like, normal? And then, thinking of just when my best friend gets her time of the month, and she’s, like, hysterical because she gets the worst cramps. And I’m just—I always just feel re-gu-lar. Even when I have it, yeah, I have a little bleeding, but my mood isn’t changing. I’m not cramping. I’m not being “super bitch” (laughs; others agreeing). I just feel, like… static.

F: Thanks, Taylor.

Sam: I don’t feel myself. What I mean by that is kind of what Taylor described. That’s not me! I’m actually really [*makes animated noises*]. So, when I feel like that, and I don’t have those signs of, like, “My period is coming,” I personally don’t like it. I don’t like not being able to, kind of, go outside of the calendar like, “Oh, I’m starting to PMS,” or this or that. And then I physically don’t like the way that it makes my body feel, as well. It makes me, kind of, feel foggy. Opposite of, kind of, what Lily and Dawn said: heavy.

F: Thanks, Sam. Any other thoughts about how contraception makes your body--- How these changes make your body feel?

Ivy:: For me, the changes do make me feel more stable and brighter. It’s interesting because at one point in my life when I wasn’t cycling, I didn’t like the way that that felt. I didn’t like that I couldn’t predict and depend on those changes in my cycle to, kind of, build the rest of my life, I guess. [*chuckles*] I’m very much a person who likes season changes and those sorts of things. Like those rhythms help me to regulate, but as I’m into different seasons of my life [*chuckles*], I really like not having to go up and down so much in those periods. Maybe because everything else is going up and down so much (laughs). So, my preference has changed over time, but I’ve felt both ways, those both ways that were described here.

F: Any other thoughts? [pause] Now I’d like to know how these menstrual changes have impacted your day-to-day life. We’ve touched on that a little bit, but thinking about positive/negative impacts on your day-to-day life.

Lily: I have far less migraines, which means that I can plan two, three weeks out, and not worry about potentially having to cancel last minute and feeling bad. It’s brought a stability to overall body pain that impacts day-to-day decisions.

F: Thanks, Lily. Other changes to your day-to-day life?

Taylor: I have to make fewer trips to the store to buy tampons (laughs). So rich now. [*sarcasm; others laughing*]

Ivy: I know. I was going to say... money. So worth it! [*sarcasm*]

Lily: You don't have to remember to bring it with you. (Laughter.)

Dawn: Yeah, Right, my bad has so much space [*laughs; sarcasm*].

Ivy: That's definitely an impact on my day-to-day… It's not that big of a deal if I didn't bring some sort of menstrual product with me, because I'm not going to be bleeding so heavily that I can't make it to the next stop or whatever. Whereas before, if I was going to get it, it would come on pretty fierce. So, there's just, like, not a day-to-day worry about… Well, even when it was pretty unpredictable, I wasn't too concerned about that happening. And then as far as just other day-to-day, because I have that stability, I'm not preoccupied about wondering if I'm going to have symptoms that are going to make me feel like I need to shift or changing plans. You know, something like, "What am I going to do for my workout?" Or swimming, or whatever it happens to be. So, it's a lot easier to plan things. [*others agreeing*]

F: Thanks, Ivy. I heard Taylor and Dawn say, "Didn't have to buy products," and then Ivy, you all kind of---

Dawn: I have one more thing. Cleanliness, too, because again, I'm a very clean person. I can't wear tampons because they make me uncomfortable, so I was a pad person. And it was just like constantly feeling dirty and messy and soiled. And then I'd have to constantly change. So, it's such a relief that I don't have to... [*laughs*].

Taylor: I, actually, want to add to that. It's similar with the feeling clean, but in a different sense. I hate using public restrooms, and I never have to pee. I have trained myself to never have to go [*laughs*]. But I feel like when I have my period, I have to because then I'm worried, "What if I had the tampon in too long? I probably should go to the bathroom." So, then I'm forced to use public restrooms because I have to change my tampon. So, similar to that, I feel like now I'm dirty, and having to carry a tampon.

Lily: For me, anyway, when I use tampons, I have to go to the bathroom more frequently. [Dawn: Yeah, yeah.] I feel like I have to go more often. [Dawn: Oh, absolutely. I didn't even think of that. Absolutely.]

F: Thanks, Lily.

Ivy: I have less laundry to do. [*others laugh*] I use reusable pads… [others laugh] I probably have less laundry to do because I don't have children (laughs), but in that regard, less of my own.

Lily: Less stains to remove.

Dawn: Yes, for sure.

Emma: My day-to-day has improved. I used to have pretty bad acne that didn't come on until I was an adult, and the birth control helped with that, which helped with my self image quite a bit. And now I don't have it. My biggest issues, when I was on my period, were extreme bloating to the point where I had two different pants sizes, [Others: Oh, my goodness.] And extreme fatigue, where I just couldn't do anything. So, the pill has helped a lot with that.

Dawn: I didn't think of fatigue. That's totally something that Mirena has helped with me too. I forgot that symptom because it's been so long since I've had it (laughs).

F: So, less fatigue since, Dawn?

Dawn: Less fatigue, yes.

F: Any final thoughts on day-to-day life? Because once again, [note taker names] have been noting what you've said on cards to help us remember. They're going to put them up. For impact on life: "less fatigue", "improved mental well being", "improved day to day", "less laundry to do related to menses", "more relief in day-to-day life", "better cleanliness", "easier to plan days", "less day-to-day worry", "better for financial impact", "less hassle", "fewer trips to the store", "brought stability to the overall day-to-day", "less migraines", "worse mood", "too much PMS", "less or no more sad emotions", "less or no emotional response", and "less PMS"**. Then for how the body feels, we have:** "cleaner", "relieved", "heavy", "mood changes", "normal", "feels lighter, brighter", "more stable", and "don't feel like myself"**. Anything that we missed? Anything that you wanna add?**

Ivy: I would say an impact on my life is also my sex life. [Others: Oh.] That's important I don't know if sex life is in a separate section [*referring to a different part of the discussion*] or we're going to talk about that more [F: Say more] So, because of all of these other things—less worried about bleeding and when it's going to happen—just feeling brighter, less moody, all of those sorts of things. I'm more interested in engaging in sex, as well as enjoying it more.

Dawn: I'm the actual opposite of that. That's one of the only drawbacks from Mirena. It is completely [ooff] [*exhale expression indicating sex drive is low*] . My sex drive is just not good (laughs). It's pretty low, but I'll take no periods over that (laughs).

Taylor: I have a weird combination too. My sex drive is also very high/I have less of an excuse that I can't have sex (laughs) So, when I have my period, I'm like, "Oh, can't do it now," [*tone indicating slight raking of feeling bad about not being able to have sex*] but when I'm not, I'm like, "It's fine, we can." [*tone indicating slight resignation about having to have sex*] …Just don't really want to. [*said softly*]

F: Any final thoughts to add to any of this? We're going to leave the color cards here. [pause] All good? We're going to do another activity together, so you can show us more about your experience with menstrual cramping while using contraception. We are going to give you some stickers and we're also--- We've got some body maps here. We're going to give you different colored stickers that correspond to the different types of contraception. I'm going to ask you to take the stickers and put them anywhere on the body, on the front and back, where you have felt menstrual cramping while using contraception. First, let's have people who are using pills or have used them in the past come and get--- [Note taker name] is going to hand out these yellow stickers. [P: In the past? **F: Yeah. P:** Ooh, okay**] Sio==I, if you've had—anywhere in the body where you've experienced cramping. I know it's a little cozy in here, but we're not in a rush. [*The discussion room is somewhat small, and participants have a bit of difficulty getting their stickers and going to the body maps*]. Okay [*pause*] [Taylor:** Where is the restroom? **F: Restroom… Note taker:** It's down the hall that way, and then take a right.] [**Emma**: Someone has already put them where I'm also... F**: That's fine. Pile them on.**] **[*Pause*]**

F: Next we have green stickers for if you're using injections or have used them in the past. And blue stickers for implants. [*Pause*] [**P***:* Mirena is an implant, right? Or is that just… **P**: IUD. **P**: Is that the category IUD? That's what I was wondering. P: IUD… in the arm, with insertions, right? **P**: Implant would be Nexplanon. **P**: There you go; Nexplanon, that's the word. Thank you.] **[*Pause*] And then purple is non-hormonal copper IUD, and red for the hormonal.[pause] We're going to run through the colors one more time, so pick a color corresponding to a type of contraception, and then we're putting them on the body, front and back, in areas where you've experienced menstrual cramps. [P::** Then, a different color?] **Yeah, so different colors for different types of contraception. For pills,**

we have yellow, and for injections, we have green. Implants, blue. Then non-hormonal or copper IUD, purple, hormonal IUD, red, and then any other hormonal method, we have orange stickers. Anyone need me to repeat anything? Did you get everything up there?

(No audible response.)

F: Now we have one last sticker. It's a gold star. You're all going to get just one. (Laughter.) This time, get a gold star sticker and put it on the poster in one place on the body where the menstrual cramping bothers you the most. [pause] If it's two sides of the body, you can have two, but otherwise one sticker. (Laughter.) One placement. [pause]

Sam: This feels like you get punched right there. [*pointing towards lower abdomen area*] (Laughter.) [other: Ouch]

F: Everybody get their gold star up there?

F: Okay, let's take a look at this. Starting with the front. I see a lot of stickers right here. What are some words used to describe this place on the body?

Dawn: Abdomen.

F: Dawn said "abdomen". Others?

Lily: Tummy.

F: "Tummy".

Respondent: Belly.

F: "Belly".

Ivy: Pelvis. Pelvic area.

Dawn: Stomach.

F: Anything else?

(No audible response.)

F: Now, can someone who put stickers here tell me about their menstrual cramping?

Ivy: I put mine up there. I'd like to just tell you about it, too.

F: Yes, let's hear it.

Ivy: When I was taking the depo shots in my sides, even post-injection, I would feel cramping in that area a lot.

F: Others experience--- A lot of stickers here.

Lily: I was told at a young age that when the egg drops, it bursts a cyst, so I just feel sharp stabs. I used to just say, "I can feel my ovaries," because that's right where it is.

F: Thanks, Lily. Other experiences with cramping in this area? What's it like?

Emma: I'd say little pokes, just something that isn't normally there. I won't get very intense cramping,

but it's more just I know something is going on. It's just jabbing me a little bit.

F: Thanks, Emma.

Dawn: Jabbing in the--- Sometimes a dull pain. It's a dull pain now, but it's mellow. It's definitely not the stabbing that it was before.

Ivy: When I was using the copper IUD, it was definitely sharper and more like big squeezes. Now it's just more like pokes.

F: What about these gold stars? A lot of you put gold stars in this area. Why does cramping here bother you the most?

Taylor: I don't want things touching me, so I feel like clothing is more limited. I don't wanna have shorts on or even my underwear. Everything touching me annoys me.

F: Thanks, Taylor.

Lily: Mine is right where my pants sit, so when I have my pants on and then it cramps, everything just feels too tight.

F: Thanks, Lily.

Sam: Same as what Lily said, my high-wasted pants, it just creates a lot of pressure, which in turn, it feels like everything is pushing down. It's like a pulsing on and off feeling, which is why I put the star down there because it's just pressure. It hurts really low.

F: Any other thoughts on this part of the body, or are we going to move to the next section?

(No audible response.)

F: Can you all see the back here? I see one kind of up here. What are some words that people would use to describe this part of the body?

Respondent: The mid-back.

F: The back. Anything else?

Respondent: The spine.

F: Someone who had experience cramping here, do you want to---

Sam: I had an epidural. Is that what you're… I was thinking of that as well, but what were you going to say---

F: Oh, I was going to ask for what experiences you had.

Sam: I still get a pain where it feels similar to where the epidural is when I menstruate. It's only around that time, so it doesn't really seem like a pain that's like, "Oh, this is back pain." I need to see a consultation for getting an epidural, but it just gives a similar feeling, and it can go as far as up to that mid back. Typically, they're lower, but I've experienced it there as well.

F: Then I see a lot of stickers on this part of the body. What are some words that you would use to describe this part of the body?

Respondent: Low back.

F: Low back. Anything else?

Ivy: Sacral area.

Respondent: Hips

F: Someone who put a sticker in this part of the body, tell me your experiences with cramping in that area. What was it like?

Emma: The majority of my cramping pain before, and now, though it's not so bad, is in my back. I'm not sure why, but that's where I felt it the most. Now it's sort of a dull ache.

F: Thanks, Emma.

Ivy: With the copper IUD, it was really concentrated there, and would still feel those squeezes, but really intense. Throbbing low back pain around the sacrum. My hips get severely sore.

F: There are some--- A couple gold stars there. Someone who put a gold star there, do you wanna tell me, why does menstrual cramping bother you the most here?

Ivy: For me, it was because probably it just restricted so much more movement, whether that was me wanting to work out or even just lying in bed. It was so much more uncomfortable. It felt all encompassing there.

Taylor: For me, it made it harder to be active and doing the things I wanted to do before I was on the pill, and now it's better. It's still there, but not as bad.

F: Any final thoughts on the body on here?

(No audible response.)

F: Next, I wanna hear about how you manage menstrual cramping.

Sam: Ibuprofen 800s.

F: Sam, Ibuprofen.

Lily: I just got to the point where it does not matter what medication I take, it doesn't work. Ice doesn't work, heat doesn't work, so I just go hide in the bathroom until they go away.

F: Thanks, Lily. Other ways that managing cramps?

Taylor: Yes, I'll just sit on the couch and relax a little bit if it's bothering me. [*others agreeing*]

Dawn: Rest.

F: Anything you avoid doing?

Taylor: Yoga. Usually, I avoid yoga if I'm planning on going because I don't wanna move more.

Sam: Eat the pain away. (Laughter.) Ice cream.

Ivy: In the past, heat. Heat has really helped. I don't really need to manage it so much now because it's mild.

Taylor: Stretching and light exercise.

F: For those of you that have had less or reduced menstrual cramping and pain using contraception, can you tell me a little bit about that experience? How did it change?

Lily: I don't have to take a week off of work [*laughs*]. I can, you know, function and hang out throughout it.

Dawn: Just normality. Moments of sitting down or needing to rest.

Ivy: I think for me, my partner, for sure, wouldn't even know if I was menstruating at this point, unless I said something, whereas before, it was so obvious. You could see it on my face. You could tell I was moving slower or just not as engaged. It's affected the day to day in that regard.

F: Thanks, Ivy.

Taylor: I would say not disrupting my normal routines. I have a gym schedule, I'm on track with it, but if I was in pain and couldn't move, I'd have to take rest time. I don't have to do that, so it doesn't really affect me.

F: Now for the next few questions, I'm looking back at all of the ways that contraception has changed your menstrual cycle that we have here on the wall, all of the areas in your body where you felt cramping, and all the ways that these things have impacted you. What information did you get from the clinic or health provider about changes to your menstrual cycle before you started using the method you are currently using? Dawn?

Dawn: Wait, say that again. I'm so sorry.

F: What information did you get from the clinic or provider about changes before you started?

Dawn: The first time that I did it?

F: Yes.

Dawn: I can recall pretty basic listings. Of course the huge road map of the things (laughs). They gave me a huge amount of brochures and stuff and just piled it up in my hands. It was so long ago, but I feel like they listed off the generality of it and talked about it. One lady had a little pin that had an IUD on it, just a little pin. She was like, "This is what it looks like." I was like, "That's so cool. Thank you." (Laughs.)

F: Would you say that this information that you got was helpful?

Dawn: Yes. I feel like because I chose Mirena, she was very passionate about it and was very warm and friendly. It's all coming back to me now that I'm thinking about it, but she was very smiley and she pointed to it. She was like, "A lot of people really love this and da, da, da, da, da," had a lot of good things to say about it, and I was like, "Sold," (laughs).

F: Any other experiences of information? Lily?

Lily: I got a little general picture book. She was like, "This is the Nexplanon. Here's how long it lasts for. Here's the Mirena. Here's how long it lasts for," and then a sentence of, "Most people have their periods on these ones." When I started the pill, I had gone to a second doctor because the first doctor was an awful human being. I feel like they thought I had an understanding of birth control because I was like, "I don't want an IUD. I don't want Nexplanon. I don't care what else we wanna do, but those are off the

table." They gave me no information other than what comes in my little pill packet that I throw away. (laughter)

F: Sam?

Sam: The providers made the recommendation of birth control to me based on it impacting my cycle. It wasn't, "To prevent pregnancy." It wasn't, "To help reduce symptoms," other than, "It can change your cycle in these positive ways that they make." That was how that information was given to me.

Ivy: For me, it was the Mirena. It was initially shared with me that I would have lighter to no cycles, or bleeding, sorry. Lighter to no bleeding, less cramping, maybe shorter cycles if I did have shorter bleeding. So those were all positives, and why I went for it.

Dawn: I just remembered something (laughs). I was like, "It's all coming back to me now." She specifically said that the amount of hormones compared to others. She gave me the dosage. She was so thorough. I remember it to this day, she said exactly what it does and how the hormone affects the thing. She explained that, "It's like you're pregnant all the time. The body gets fooled," and she was in great detail. It was so helpful. I was like, "Thank you so much," (laughs).

F: Now think about all the changes we've talked about today. What do you wish they had told you? What do you wish they had told you more about the changes to your menstrual cycle before you started contraception? What do you wish you knew more?

Lily: Consistency. It scared me. I literally booked an appointment with my OBGYN two months in and I was like, "It doesn't look right. It looks very much different from what I used to with the clumping and the gooey," and I thought something was---

F: The consistency of the blood.

Lily: Yes.

F: Thanks, Lily.

Taylor: I didn't answer the last question, but it's been so long that I've been on the pill that I don't really remember what I was told or not. I don't remember anyone telling me that there would be months that I just maybe wouldn't get my period. I do also remember making an appointment, and I was like, "Could I be pregnant? What's going on?" They were like, "Oh, sometimes you just won't get it." I was like, "I wish I knew that," just so I wasn't thinking I was immaculately concepting a birth control baby (laughs).

F: Yes, Sam?

Sam: I wish they would have told me that it mimics being pregnant, because I can't tell you how many times I went into the doctor's, "I think I'm pregnant. I don't think this birth control is working. My period isn't coming," and just any of those others, "I feel nauseous." Just anything that you could think of with pregnancy, I did not know for the longest that it was tricking my body until someone explained it to me. I was like, "That would have been nice to know, actually, the science and what was going on behind it." Then that's when we were able to get into, "Well, there's Plan B," and all of those other things for me to understand how it works and how it impacts your body, because as I mentioned with the last question, they sold it to me on, "It just changes your cycle." Not even, "It prevents pregnancy."

F: Any other thoughts about what you wish you had had more information on?

Dawn: Oh, the amount of pain. They do warn that it pains, but…

Emma: No, I agree with you on that one. (Laughter.) Actually, for Mirena and Skyla, the three-year one. Understanding that if you had not had kids, that is a pain you will never want to experience again, because the lady tried for 20 minutes to get it in and did not explain. She was like, "Oh, you're going to feel a little bit of cramping and little pokes here." I wanted to punch her in the face. (Laughter.) Twenty minutes, and I was crying.

F: The pain when you got that the IUD, you mean. Dawn: The insertion pain.

Emma: Yes, mm-hmm (affirmative) They couldn't get it in. So, understanding, especially if you haven't had kids yet, it's a lot harder.

F: Thanks for sharing that.

Ivy: I just wanted to tell you, that pain, because I had it, similar to contractions.

Dawn: Good to know. Oh my God.

Sam: Yes, it was similar to contractions for me. It was horrible. I wanted to go number two, throw up, and pee all at the same time. It was the worst feeling, and it was indescribable to giving birth.

Dawn: Oh, and the fun thing is that Mirena has now cheapened their plastic, and so it broke two times when they were trying to do it last time. It broke two times and she was very nice, but it was the worst. Of the three times I've gotten it, that was the worst pain for me.

Taylor: One thing, this is very specific, but I avoid soy. I know that over the years, I've discovered more about my sensitivity to it. I know some medicines have soy in it and it's something that I… I'm fairly certain my birth control doesn't have it because I would, hopefully, react to it, but I also--- A doctor never confirmed that with me, and they never do with any of my medications. I think in general, if anyone has any kind of allergy or sensitivity, the doctor should probably check it off and be like… Even with the plastic, if there are certain things they're putting in it, like, "Could this be a problem for you?" so I think just going over all the details just to make sure that you can handle it.

F: Thanks, Taylor.

Dawn: Yes, that warning wasn't given until the first one broke (laughs). I was like, "Why did it break?" "Oh, they just cheapened the thing." I was like, "Oh, thanks," but she was a sweetheart.

F: What do you think is the most important information that you would want a friend to know about these changes, before starting contraception?

Dawn: Oh, hmm (thinking). They're shopping around for something, is that what you mean?

F: Right. What's the most important information that you think a provider should…

Lily: Compare your options. [Dawn: Mm-hmm (agreement).] Look at the details of what it does and look at--- Every medicine that comes with a "Here are the common side effects. Weigh the costs and benefits," of all those before making a decision on which one. Because I said, "Oh, yes, let's do the IUD. But It didn't work. And she was like, "Well, I have a Nexplanon." I was like, "All right, put it in," and I didn't end up getting that. She was actually have any in the office, but I later was doing more research on it and decided that I did not want the Nexplanon, so making an informed decision.

F: The most important information is getting all the information.

Lily: Yes.

Taylor: Figuring out what's right for you. I am pretty sure I ended up on the pill because I was just like, "I need the pill. My best friend takes it," and I don't think I ever had a conversation about all the differences. I think specific to the person, like you said, you have certain reasons. Also, if it's someone that's maybe wanting to get pregnant in the future, are there some that you need to be off of it for longer? You need all the information to get the right thing for you.

Sam: Building off of what Taylor was saying, understanding what the intent is for the reason to seek out birth control. It's not just for preventing pregnancies. It's helping with headaches, helping with cramping, helping with bleeding, all of those things, so looking at the intent of it and then shopping, similarly to what Lily went through, understanding what your options are. Looking at those side effects. Even for instance, there have been some black label warnings that have come out with some of those, so again, understanding that and your body and how it can impact you if you wanted to get pregnant later on.

Dawn: The other thing is the amount of time that Mirena can be left in your body has changed over the years, and so I really hope that… I absolutely tell people that. I'm like, "You've got to know that it's not just five years. You can actually leave it in longer." They say it now, but the second time I got it, they were like, "Oh, good news, you're getting it out so soon." I was like, "I was not told this," (laughs). They were like, "Well, for the next time." I was like, "Oh, thanks." The length of time. Updates are helpful.

Lily: That's a good way to put that. If there's a way, when you get a long-acting method to get updates. [**Dawn:** Yeah.] It would be beneficial, because not all of us are watching the contraceptive news.

Dawn: Exactly (laughs).

Ivy: I think information that the common experience doesn't mean it's going to be your experience, so "Even though this is commonly what happens, it's not always what happens." I think if people would know that going into it, it can be really beneficial to not… That way, if they're not having that common experience, then they can talk to a provider about it or just kind of expect the unexpected in that way (laughs).

F: Thanks, Ivy. We are going to do one last activity. For this final activity, we're going to talk about two questions that healthcare providers or researchers sometimes ask people about their menstrual cycle. I will ask you each the question, and then give you a few minutes to discuss. The first question we will talk about is: when you last had a period, would you describe it as light, moderate, or heavy? When you last had a period, would you describe it as light, moderate, or heavy? [pause]

Dawn: Very light.

F: First, I'm going to have you raise your hand. Please raise your hand if you would say "light" when you last had a period. We're going to get up and move around a little bit. For all of you that said "light", could you come over to this side of the room? If you would say "heavy"... You can stay right where you are. [*Note: Taylor, Emma, Ivy, Dawn, Lily were light, Sam was heavy*] How did you decide on your answer? We'll start with the "light" group.

Taylor: I didn't actually know if it was my period or not. I was traveling, so it was in the off-cycle, and it

was so visually light and physically light that I was like, “Did I break something?” (laughs) I didn’t actually think it was my period.

Lily: The amount, and it felt like the menstrual products it required was next to none.

Dawn: Just wiping and seeing a spot, and I’m like, “Oh, there it is,” (laughs).

F: Anything to add to that?

Ivy: Yes, I think the amount of product was minimal. I could just manage it.

Emma: Same.

F: Thanks, Emma. Then for “heavy”, how did you decide on your answer?

Sam: How many menstrual products I went through.

F: Menstrual products.

Sam: It was a lot.

F: How long ago was the period you were thinking about when you answered this question? Could you raise your hand if it was within the last month or two? Everyone. Was there anything about this first question that made it difficult to answer? Raise your hand. No? All shaking heads. Sam?

Sam: They change a lot, and so thinking about it, I was like, “Wow, how long has it been? Was it moderate? I mean... What is moderate to me?” Then realizing, “Oh, no, I bought a Costco pack of tampons. It was not moderate at all.” That was kind of what made it a little bit difficult for me just because it fluctuates.

F: Now for the second question, we’re going to stay in our groups.

Respondent: Can we sit down?

F: Yes. [Note taker puts up second question] Sometimes health providers or researchers may ask you: 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? Could you please raise your hand if you used one? One person. How about two, three, or four?

Dawn: Can I ask a question?

F: Yes.

Dawn: When I got my Mirena and I had that heavy bleeding, I don’t really consider that a period. I’d consider that response to the Mirena, so does that count, or does that not?

F: I would just answer the question how you would answer it, and then we’ll talk about it.

Dawn: I’m going to go with one then.

F: One?

Dawn: Yes.

F: We had two for “one”. [Dawn and Ivy] Two, three, or four?

Taylor: Two.

F: Five, six, or seven?

(No audible response.)

F: Eight, nine, or 10?

(No audible response.)

F: Eleven, 12, or 13?

(No audible response.) [Sam raised hand]

F: More than 13?

Lily: I Probably used zero.

F: Yes, on the heaviest day of your last period.

Lily: My last period was three days ago, and it was only two days, and it was just… I just knew because when I looked, there was stuff there.

F: Why do you think people in your group had different answers? We're talking to the light group.

Sam: Because some people might use a tampon versus a pad, and if it's so light, they might not have to change it. If I used a pad, it's not that I totally could've used one all day, but because I use tampons, I change them just because I'm going to the bathroom. Some people know how to maneuver around it. I'm not those people, so I think it just maybe depends on what they're using

Ivy: Or if they use several things.

Lily: Yes, I think with all the light, the super, the super plus, the ultra, different… It depends on what it can absorb.

Ivy: I also think it depends on what's light for you may not be what's light for me.

F: Thanks, Ivy.

Sam: Also I know I'm not part of that group, but I like to factor in if someone has to take a bowel movement. I always change my tampon whenever I'm doing that, whether I just put in one recently or not. That can also add to how many are being used.

F: Going back to Dawn's point earlier, was there anything about the second question that made it difficult to answer? Dawn, what were you thinking?

Dawn: Yes, because it did resemble a period. When I got my Mirena, it was non stop flow, constant, constantly. I went through three pads or more It was a lot. But I've experienced that before, and when you insert it, that's when the body is like, "What?" It's not really a period. It's just whatever getting taken out and being put back in (laughs).

F: And then Lily, your option wasn't on the table. Do you want to…

Lily: Yes. It's one of those things where because of the consistency, I am able to get away with not using product more often because it's not… It's falling, but it's not falling. It's not… I only notice it when

I'm using the restroom, versus previously it was, "Oh, no, I need to go right now." Because even though I have the overnight pad in in the middle of the day, I'm going to leak. So, it's changed. And **d**o I count it as a period? Sure, I do.

F: Taylor, what were you going to say?

Taylor: I think situationally, if I had been home during my last period, if I'm still light, sometimes I won't put anything in. If I just kind of feel like, "Oh, I should probably just go and see if there's anything there," I just kind of wipe it away. Maybe I won't put a tampon in. I was actually on safari, and I was going to be out the entire day. I was also wearing beige shorts, so I was like, "I'm going to make sure I put things in just in case. I don't want a lion to eat me." (Laughter.) If I had been in a different environment, then I would have handled it differently.

F: Sam?

Sam: It is harder to answer this because I don't know how many pads or tampons that I use. When it's my heaviest day, I double up with a pad and the tampon because I know how heavy it s, and I've recently just stopped taking the pill, and I know how my body responds to it, and it becomes heavier. Preparing for it, it was hard to… I know that I went through a lot because I used a whole pack that I had before, so I finished that off and that had a good amount, and I had to buy a new one. I knew it was a lot more than normal, but I was like, "What is that normal? I don't count them. Let's guess, and think more than normal." . That's what made it so difficult for me.

F: Yeah, Ivy?

Ivy: This question is also difficult to answer if you don't use pads or tampons. I know it says "other materials", but if you're using a collection device, like a cup or a disc. I think it would have to be worded differently. And then just practically it might be like "how many times have I emptied it" or those types of things.

Dawn: I was thinking that same thing.

Ivy: Or if you're using period underwear, it's different.

Dawn: Oh, yes.

F: Sometimes people have a very small amount of bleeding. They may not even use a menstrual pad, tampons, or other material. What words do you use to describe that amount of bleeding?

Ivy and Dawn: Spotting.

Lily: For me, spotting is one or two drops. When it's consistent throughout the day for days, that switches over to a period. And then it's just a very, very light period to me. Whereas spotting is more of, you know, thrown a paintbrush And they might see spots and that's normal for them, which would be spotting.

Ivy: I think for me, too, spotting, it wasn't consistent throughout the day. Even though I might not have a lot of fluid, if it's consistent, that's when I count it as a period versus spotting is, "Maybe I'm just fine today," versus, "By the end of the day, that's happened every time I've been in the restroom, so that's my period." That's the difference between a light period and spotting to me.

F: If you had just spotting, how would you answer that second question?

Dawn: Zero. I wouldn't count it. I would count the period before it. It's been so long. That's what I was thinking of. I was like, "The last time I actually used something was just a panty liner once because it was so long ago," (laughs).

F: You've been very helpful in telling us about these two questions. We're getting to the end of this. In this next section, we have two brief questions that talk about sex and sexual relationships. I wanna restate what I said at the beginning, just to acknowledge that this can be a sensitive topic or uncomfortable, especially in a setting where we don't know each other well. You do not need to share anything you're not comfortable with. You can always step out, or we can decide to skip this section altogether. I just wanted to take the temp--- We have two quick questions. You're okay to move forward?

Respondent: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

F: We have two more things that healthcare providers or researchers may ask you about, ask you while using contraception, and so we want your opinion. Sometimes healthcare providers wanna know whether or not you've had sex recently. For some people, this is a sensitive topic and it may be hard to talk about. How would you like to be asked if you had sex?

Dawn: Ask a question before the question, "Is it okay if I ask about sexual relations that you've had recently? Yes or no?"

F: Thanks, Dawn. Permission first.

Dawn: Permission, yes.

F: Sam?

Sam: I want to know why you are asking the question. Because why is that your business unless I'm bringing it to you to talk about XYZ?

Lily: I've only ever been asked, "Are you sexually active?" Which is a completely fair question, especially if you're on…) because you can still get pregnant on birth control, on contraception, so if you are, they might still test for it in some of the tests depending on what you're in for.

F: Thanks, Lily.

Sam: I don't think I need a "safe practice". I don't necessarily care, especially if it's at the OBGYN or anything like that. I'm married. It's not a secret. If we're not having sex, maybe I wanna talk about a therapist about it too, (laughter) but we are. I just don't think it's a big deal. If there are any sort of reasons research-wise why they might wanna know, it's fine.

F: Thanks, Sam.

Emma: I wanna know what they mean by recent. Depending on why they're asking, I guess I would wanna know was it consensual? What's the point of the question here? Like Sam was saying.

F: Thanks, Emma.

Ivy: I've worked in a lot of clinics and I know there are a lot of different reasons that question can be asked, so I think putting it in the context of, "We ask because this gives us more information about other the ways we can support you," I think it can be general like that. Or, "If you are looking for something

specific, that's why we ask, because this medication or this contraception might have an effect on your sex life," that sort of thing. I think the context is part of making a consensual conversation. "Here's the context. This is what I wanna ask. Are you okay moving forward with this?" Personally, I don't care if somebody asks me, but I know that that's not the case for a lot of people that I've supported and vice versa. I think that maybe… someone else said something that made me…. Can you ask the question again?

F: Yes. Sometimes healthcare providers and researchers want to know whether or not you've had sex recently. How do you want to be asked if you've had sex?

Ivy: I think the other piece of that is that sex can be a lot of things, and so what do you want to know (laughs)? Do you want to know what kind of sex I've had? I say that as a queer person. That looks very different, I know, than in a heterodominant society. Usually, what I've seen before is, "Have you had intercourse?" But if you're also asking me because you want to know what I'm at risk for, that's different too. I think there's just not enough information there.

F: Thanks, Ivy. Sam?

Sam: I wanted to build--- Especially remembering being a young person, if a doctor asked me that, I'm lying because, "They are going to tell on me." In the knowing the why so you can be able to give that honest answer, especially with a younger child, it's going to be definitely a lot more of their--- Teens, young adult, developmentally, where that question will come up, but again, if they're not asking so they can provide the right care in telling them that, the honesty won't be there. You can ask all you want, but they'll probably lie to your face.

Lily: Right, because my mom is sitting right next to me.

Dawn: Or you can say, "We can make this a confidential…" Because Planned Parenthood does that. They're like, "Can we leave messages on the phone?" In that same idea, "We can keep this secret. We will not reveal this to a parent," or, "We have to," where the consent is--- Not consent, but confidentiality.

Sam: I think that goes with context, where they say, "Hey, this is what I'm asking, why I'm asking it. Here is the piece that comes behind that," or, "You gave us the privacy notice behind the consent form that says, 'This is what we're doing with it.'"

Dawn: Exactly.

F: Healthcare providers or researchers sometimes ask whether or not you've used a second method of contraception when you have sex. How would you like to be asked this question?

Dawn: I like that form because it feels like it covers a lot of things. Being that I do use condoms as well..

Ivy: In my experience, it should be additional. Because maybe you're using multiple or you do different ones at different times, for different reasons. So, I might suggest. "Are there additional forms of contraception you utilize?" Because again, there's many reasons to asks the question, "Are they going to interact with each other or something?"

F: Thanks, Ivy. Sam?

Sam: Context. I need more context. "What are you thinking, Doctor? Am I at risk? What's happening?

Why are you now thinking that I need to have a backup? Should I have a backup?" That's what my mind goes to, and then also, just tell me why you wanna know that. "What are you thinking?"

F: Any other thoughts on this?

(No audible response.)

F: We are coming to the end of our discussion. Before we end, is there anything else that you think we should know about your experiences with your menstrual cycle while taking contraception that we did not talk about today?

Dawn: I feel like there wasn't enough focus on the mental state. We were talking a lot about physical. I think maybe just one additional little offshoot about it, because it wasn't until I said something that there was any mention of it or conversations.

F: Do you want to say anymore about that topic?

Dawn: Again, I'm going to speak the praises of Mirena. I know not everybody had good experiences with it, but it really, really has helped not having that emotional misery that periods would give me. So, thank you, Mirean (laughs).

F: Sam?

Sam: I realize we didn't talk about weight loss or weight gain. That was a really, really big one that I was thinking about around it, but I didn't really hear a question come up that pertained to that. It doesn't impact my day to day, but overall [Dawn: Yeah, it impacts.]It impacts. That's a big one, especially for women, especially on their body and how it can affect them.

Respondent: Oh, yes. That's a good point.

Ivy: I was just going to say that I think what those comments point out is that yes, this is a conversation of how your menstrual cycle is impacted by contraception, but our menstrual cycle impacts everything else in our lives as well. It's not separate. Even though it might not be a conversation about mood change or weight gain or loss when you take the contraception, it's all interconnected---

Dawn:: It's all connected. Exactly.

F: Anxiety… Yeah

Taylor: Yes, I'll add to that, and kind of what Dawn was saying too, I don't have severe mood swings. Sometimes I'll be a little bitchy and I'm like, "Oh, it's because I'm on my period," but it's a little bit versus I know people that are almost different people, and it goes up and down. I think it definitely… When I witness that, sometimes I'm like, "I'm so glad that I'm less crazy," (laughs). I think it does weigh on the mental aspect too, why people might choose to take…

Lily: One thing I was thinking of too as far as information that doctors can give you, knowing that you might have to try more than one… I think I was on three different levels of hormones in my pill contraceptive before I found the one that makes me the most comfortable and that works. Then understanding the lower the hormone, the less effective it is for birth control, and those kinds of things too, but knowing that it's okay to change them.

Ivy: I think that's what I would add too, That question, is there anything you wish you were told It takes

time and I'm here with you. I think that, because it can often feel like I'm the failure if this birth control isn't working out for me. To have someone to talk to, to engage them.

Lily: The first time I was on it, I was on it for several months and I was like, "Oh, when I'm on my period, I feel like killing myself, so I'm just going to quit taking it because I can't be on it." When I got a new doctor several years down the line, they were like, "We can try other versions of the same thing, and we can try that, and you can come back in a month and let's talk," so that's a big one.

Dawn: Being on the pill versus Mirena, I wasn't… They just literally just gave me… There was no discussion. It was like, "Here's the pill. This is the pill." "Thanks a lot." All the bad mental reactions, I'm like, "No." The Mirena lady was so… I'll just call her "the Mirena lady" (laughs). Literally was so awesome, but it's multiple.. It's good to have that conversation, "What have you tried before?" Like, add that.

Lily: You're talking about your Mirena, I think it's important to have too, like, she's so detailed. She's so into it, but I feel like with the pill, that ball gets dropped. Everyone knows what the pill is. It's the pill, but there's not enough education. I think that's important. I wish I would have had more of it, and that just blew my mind.

Sam: Mm-hmm (agreement). Taking the pill package...(Laughter.)

F: Thank you for joining our discussion today. We're very grateful that you've shared your thoughts, your experiences, and your opinions with us. This information will be extremely helpful for our study. I am going to stop the recording. Again, today is August 26, 2025, and it is 7:28 p.m.

(End of audio.)