**Interviewer: (1:13) Today is September 3, 2025, 5:54 p.m. This is focus group 30-04. Before we begin, I want to help us open our minds and think creatively and openly. Because we're not sharing our names or personal information, I have one short question for you to get to know each other a little bit, and that is: what animal do you most relate to and why did you select this animal? I'm going to say today, because of this last weekend, a chicken. I felt like I was just running around doing all kinds of… Dropping people off and picking people up. Anyone else want to take a shot? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** I'd probably say a cat. I just love cats. I'm so jealous, every day when I leave for work and the cat is just lounging in bed. That's the life I wish I lived (laughs).

**Interviewer: (2:18) What about you, Emma?**

**Emma:** I'd say probably a cat or a (2:25 unclear) as in they're busy, but then no busy at all, but at the same time (2:29 unclear).

**Interviewer: (2:34) Ivy?**

**Ivy:** I like that. Any type of reptile because I'm always cold (laughs). It can be 90 degree weather, and I'll always wear a sweater (laughs).

**Interviewer: (2:46) Sam, what about you?**

**Sam:** I wish I knew more actual specific birds, but I would pick some type of bird. Always building things, doing things, flying around place to place Because I'm also super busy, I have a lot going on.

**Interviewer: (3:05) We are very happy that each of you are part of our discussion today, so let's begin. For the rest of our discussion, we're going to 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, so what are some of the words that you use? Feel free to raise your hand. (3:26 Unclear) hands up. Jacinda?**

**Jacinda: "**Period"

**Interviewer: (3:27) "Period". Emma?**

**Emma:** "Period", I hear "moon cycle" a lot too.

**Interviewer: (3:35) Other things? They don't have to be things you say, but things that you know of that people have used or referred to.**

**Sam: "**Menstruation".

**Emma:** For me, just "period" (laughs).

**Interviewer: (3:55) "Period", yes. Great.**

**Sam:** Sometimes more specifically, "free bleeding" I'm hearing around more.

**Interviewer: (4:07) Thanks,, Sam. And what does free bleeding mean to you?**

**Sam:** Not using any products. I've heard it used as like an empowering term, but I've also had it where I've used that like, "Oh, I don't have anything; I'm free bleeding," but as a panic moment.

**Interviewer: (4:28) How do people keep track of their menstrual cycles to know when they might start bleeding the next time? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** Fitbit does it for me. (Laughter.)

**Sam:** I use my calendar on my phone.

**Interviewer: (4:44) Thanks, Sam.**

**Emma:** Same, here (laughs).

**Interviewer: Sam, calendar? And Emma?**

**Ivy:** Yeah, calendar.

**Interviewer: (4:55) Anything else?**

**Emma:** Me and my roommates have always used to have those cycle tracking apps so we can make notes about our cycle to learn about our periods.

**Interviewer: (5:09) Thanks, Emma.**

**Jacinda:** I'm old enough that I did receive a paper calendar (Laughs). And you just mark it with a red dot.

**Interviewer: (5:18) Thanks, Jacinda. 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 people menstruate have. This includes the days when you are bleeding, the time just before you bleed, the times after, and all the times in between, the whole cycle. Now I would like you to think about your own menstrual cycles and how they change while using contraception. Both changes that you have liked and changes that you have not liked. First, tell me about the ways that contraception has changed how often you have bleeding. Again, I'll call on you. How often, any thoughts? Ivy?**

**Ivy:** For me, for example, last August, I was bleeding for two whole weeks, and then for three weeks I just had spotting until today. Still having the spotting. So I kind of hate that, but then there are some months that I don't even bleed at all, so that, kind of… (Laughs.) It's just a pain in the ass when it's constantly bleeding.

**Interviewer: (6:43) Just think about changes to how often. Emma?**

**Emma:** I get really close to having no periods at all. I've even gone months, so I don't think I've had a period in the past four months. Even when I go off the pill for a week so, I get little to no periods. Then when I do have a period, they're about two weeks long and painful.

**Interviewer: (7:16) (7:16 Unclear.)**

**Jacinda:** Oh, I would say the frequency is fairly and very light, but it will be that way for a year, and then I won't have one for two months, three months, and then it just goes back to be fairly regular. I will skip some of them.

**Interviewer: (7:45) Sam?**

**Sam:** I've had different experiences with different contraceptives. Most recently, I did the depo one, which I had been sort of afraid of since I was in high school. I was trying to skip periods,

intentionally, for the first time I went on it, and it didn't go according to plan, so I was having… I don't know, I followed the schedule that it said and they just weren't skipping, so then it just became really unpredictable. It wouldn't be the date that I planned out on my calendar, that was pretty accurate all the time. Then it would be for more days, also, than I was used to. That was the pill, but I don't know if you want me to speak to other products that I've used (8:44 unclear). I used a copper IUD before and that definitely made my periods heavier and kind of longer than not being on any contraceptive.

**Interviewer: (9:00) That's a good segue because now I want you to tell me ways that contraception has changed how regular you have bleeding. We covered a little bit of that already, but if you could sum up the regular. Who wants to go? Emma?**

**Emma:** I would say I'm not bleeding very often. I'd say I go probably four or five months with little to no bleeding at all, and then I'll go the month or two after with bleeding for a whole month and two weeks (9:38 unclear). I would say the majority of they year, I don't have periods at all.

**Interviewer: (9:54) Regular. Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** Most of the time, it's fairly regular. We're talking about the frequency? Regular---

**Interviewer: (10:05) Yes, if it's regular. How regular? Predictability.**

**Jacinda:** Yes, it's relatively predictable.

**Interviewer: (10:17) Others?**

**Ivy:** (10:20 Unclear/choppy audio) It can be really unpredictable… So, I'll go two months with no bleeding and then once I had two months of full bleeding and spotting, but these past months, I've had three months without bleeding and spotting some . I don't know if anybody else gets this but I feel like when I'm more sexually active is when it starts to bleed and I'm not (10:54 unclear).

**Interviewer: (11:03) Now I want you to tell me ways that contraception has changed how long you're bleeding, the duration. Any thoughts there? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** Shortened it significantly. It's maybe like 3 days.

**Ivy:** For me, it's been longer. (11:24 Unclear.)

**Interviewer: (11:28) Thanks, Ivy. Any thoughts on duration?**

**Sam:** It's been both for me. It's been shorter and it's been longer, even on the same contraception (11:41 unclear). Now it's more unpredictable (laughs).

**Interviewer: (11:48) Emma?**

**Emma:** Sometimes when I do have them, they are much longer than without contraception.

**Interviewer: (11:57) Thanks, Emma. Now when you have bleeding, how has contraception changed how much you bleed during those days?**

**Jacinda:** It's very little.

**Interviewer: (12:13) Very little?**

**Jacinda:** I would never use a tampon. I've really only used panty liners, even if I have to change it more often, it's like, that's all I need.

**Ivy:** Lighter for me too. They used to be really heavy.

**Interviewer: (12:40) Thanks, Ivy. Sam?**

**Sam:** It's been both for me (laughs). It's been a struggle. Sometimes it's heavier sometimes way more clotting and then it's (12:54 inaudible). Maybe the last one I had, they were closer together or something because they're not unpredictable too, but I don't totally track that.

**Respondent:** (13:10 Unclear.)

**Interviewer: (13:13) Emma, do you have something to add?**

**Emma:** (13:15 Inaudible) (13:18 unclear). Mine are pretty heavy and clotting. I feel like I don't have a range, their just always heavy.

**Interviewer: (13:31) Now what about how the bleeding looks? How has contraception changed what the blood looks like? Ivy?**

**Ivy:** I think it's like a dark sort of red or brown color.

**Interviewer: (13:46) Others?**

**Jacinda:** Same.

**Interviewer: (13:47) Same?**

**Sam:** Yes, agreed.

**Interviewer: (13:51) Dark red or brown. Any other changes to consistency? Someone mentioned clotting.**

**Emma:** Especially when it's (14:03 inaudible) thick looking and more stringy when taking contraception… (14:07 unclear) take pill contraception, it's a lot (14:15 unclear).

**Respondent:** It's like (14:17 unclear).

**Emma:** Yes.

**Interviewer: (14:24) Now would you tell me how contraception has changed your menstrual cramps?**

**Respondent:** I definitely don't have cramps anymore (laughs).

**Ivy:** I get a lot of cramps.

**Interviewer: (14:40) Ivy said more cramps. Others? Sam?**

**Sam:** When I was younger, I had a lot of really bad cramping. I didn't really for a while. With the copper IUD, I had really bad, like really bad cramping And with the pill, it's been about the same, but prolonged like I would have more days of it, but not more intensely..

**Interviewer: (15:22) What about over here? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** I'm feeling very lucky, mine is very minimal. I had very bad cramping as a teenager and in my twenties. Now I use the Mirena IUD and um… yeah I'll have a slight twinge. Like I know it's happening or it's coming but that's it. Like, I don't ever have to take over the counter pills which I lived on when I was younger (when she used to get bad cramps before using contraception).

**Interviewer: (15:56) Emma?**

**Emma:** When I do have periods, I have really bad cramps for sure. When I don't have a period, I still get what I call ghost cramps which is when normally I would be on my period but I don't bleed and have some light cramps. so it's kind of random (16:16 unclear).

**Interviewer: (16:17) Thanks for sharing all of that. While you've been sharing your experiences, Maddie and Leah have been noting them on cards to help us remember. They are going to get situated and come up and put them on the board so that we can review and discuss. When we were talking about how often, we heard:** "more often", "less often sometimes, but also regular", "less often/no period", and "no bleeding some months". **When we talked about how regular, we heard:** "fairly regular/predictable", "unpredictable", "three months no bleeding, several with spotting", "irregular", "four to five months, none, and frequent the next month", and "more bleeding when sexually active". **When we talked about how much:** "lighter, just panty liners", "very little bleeding", "heavy", "heavier and more spotting", and "variable". **Then for how long: "**longer", "shortened", "longer", "both long and short". **Then what the blood looks like, it looks:** "thick and cloudy", "noticed spotting", "dark, red, or brown". **And then for menstrual cramps,** "cramping with no bleeding", "same intensity", "slight twinge", "really bad cramping", "more cramps", "prolonged cramps"**. Anything that we missed? The "ghost cramping" I remember.**

**Ivy:** When I tell you about cramping its like, thank you for doing the study (laughs). That's how bad the cramping has been.

**Interviewer: (18:15) (18:16 Unclear) contraception. Anything else to add up here?**

(No audible response.)

**Interviewer: (18:30) What about, are there any other ways contraception has changed your menstrual cycle?**

**Sam:** Can we talk about mood?

**Interviewer: (18:42) Yes. Let's talk about how these changes of the menstrual cycle have made your body feel, including mood. Go ahead, Sam. Let's hear it.**

**Sam:** That's a huge one for me, and that's sort of why I was scared of the pill or anything hormonal for a really long time because when I was a teenager and first starting on birth control, it really affected my mood, like terribly raging angry is how I would describe it. I've never hurt anybody or wanted to hurt anybody or myself or anything like that, but it was very short... you know, short tempered. That's been my most recent experience with hormone contraceptives as well.

**Interviewer: (19:30) It's made you more…**

**Sam:** Yes, I had to stop them because it was so bad, and then it would… I already do have mood changes for PMS, possibly PMDD, but it's not diagnosed, but then that was lasting longer…, and it'd be more intense. It was pretty terrible.

**Interviewer: (19:56) Thanks for sharing that, Sam. What about other changes to how contraception has made your body feel?**

**Ivy:** I feel like I've been more tired.

**Interviewer: (20:11) More tired, Ivy?**

**Ivy:** Yes.

**Interviewer: (20:18) Yes, Jacinda, I mean Emma? Oh, go ahead.**

**Emma:** I think I'm glad I've been taking the pill since middle school. I think I more so noticed the differences when I was younger. When I had originally started, I had very severe periods and cramping here and it helped me. They made me more aggressive, my periods because they were so bad. I think I'd say they definitely made me more tired, and it interacts with some of my other medications. When I started the new one, I got more aggravated. I was getting aggravated much more easily and really tired no matter how much sleep I got. Those were the main differences trying to connect to just the pill.

**Interviewer: (21:14) What about you, Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** I would say that I still do experience changes in my mood, but that has not been that impactive but I do have like fewer other physical, like breast tenderness… like all of that has really dampened, like feeling sluggish or…

**Interviewer: (21:43) There's less of that, less symptom?). Any other things to your body?**

**Respondent:** Weight gain, bloating.

**Interviewer: (21:59) Okay. You saw more of that on contraception?**

**Respondent:** Yes.

**Respondent:** And also increased appetite.

**Interviewer: (22:14) Now I want to hear how these changes have impacted your day-to-day life. Thoughts on that? (22:25 Unclear.) Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** So far, it's been great. I love the Mirena IUD because I hardly have a period. It's like…It just is very little inconvenience to me.

**Interviewer: (22:46) Other thoughts?**

**Emma:** For me, I won't have a period for a few month and then once I finally have one, it's pretty horrible. It depends about how long it's been, so I'd say very variation is inconvenient. It's much easier to do things when you know.

**Interviewer: (23:13) Are there things that you avoid doing or things that you find easier in your day to day?**

**Emma:** It depends, like if it's been four or five months of no period, I just don't drive when I get mine because it's so painful. So depending on pain. And then for school, nothing that's too much like exercise and bending. I get really, really bad cramps, so mostly it's just driving (23:46 unclear) people (23:49 inaudible).

**Interviewer: (23:53) Other thoughts over here? (23:54 Unclear) this is your day-to-day life.**

**Ivy:** For me, I have to take time off of work because I have a more physical job and the pain is just… it's so painful, my head seems like it's going to explode, so I just rest all day. The pressure can last one to two days, it's just the beginning of my period when that happens.

**Interviewer: (24:19) Thanks, Ivy.**

**Sam:** I would say I'm really tired on my period either way, all the time, with contraceptives or not, so I don't think that's increased. I can't get enough sleep sometimes, but I would say some mood changes after being on contraception affects day to day as far as interpersonal relationships. I might be shitty to someone in my life.(laughs). I try to be aware of it, but then sometimes I'm not going to think, "What is my body going through right now?" You know and just react. In that way, I will try to alter what I'm doing in my day or put on my noise cancelling headphones. Maybe more avoidant to interactions or more complex interactions.

**Interviewer: (25:19) Thanks, Sam. Anyone--- You say (25:22 unclear) relationships. What about sex? Sex life, has that made a difference for anyone? Want to share?**

**Respondent:** When I'm on my period, we don't have sex.

**Interviewer: (25:34) Can you say that again?**

**Ivy:** When I'm on my period, we don't have sex and my period can last pretty long.

**Emma:** Yes when (UNCLEAR), it's different. I have sex quite often when I'm not on my period and when I am on my period, I try to avoid sex after that. I limit sex after periods while I recover from period symptoms. (laughs) So I guess that would be a big change.

**Interviewer: (26:10) Thanks, Emma. Anyone else want to add anything to that? Or leave it?**

**Jacinda:** I feel like because my period is so light and only for 3 days. It's not really easier, it's like, it's kind of like I don't have to think about it. Not that I've always avoided sex when I had regular, more regular period, but I'm just like, it's not a consideration.

**Sam:** On birth control, I have a drastically decreased sex drive. Really noticeable. Just the physical responses of my body, even not just like mental make it harder to like be lubricated, you know. It's physical, mental and emotional, I'm not super interested in it. And usually, not on birth control, I have a higher sex drive.

**Interviewer: (27:14) Thanks, Sam. Once again, Leah and Maddie have been writing what you've been saying. We're going to add that to our wall here to review.**

(27:26-27:42 Silence.)

**Interviewer: (27:42) First, we talked about how your body feels. We heard:** "weight gain", "fewer or less symptoms", "increased appetite", "bloating", "tired", "breast tenderness", "more easily aggravated", "improved mood", "longer or more intense mood changes", "short temper", "angry" and "mood changes". **Then for impact on life:** "less interested in sex", "decreased sex drive", "easier to have a sex life", "impacts physical activity", "sex more often", "avoid sex on period", "less or no sex when on period", "impacts ability to drive", "more avoidant of conflict or interactions", "affects interpersonal relationships", "impacts work life", "variation of being easy and difficult",

"great when no period", "there's little inconvenience" and then "great". **Anything else to add to how your body feels for your "impact"?**

**Sam:** I'd say also, "increased crying".

**Interviewer: (29:05) "Increased crying", thanks, Sam. Any final thoughts on the cards? We're going to move on to a different activity. Now we're going to do another activity over here.**

**(29:25-29:39 Silence.)**

**Interviewer: (29:39) We're going to use these bodies to show us about your experience with menstrual cramping when using contraception. You have stickers. We'll give you stickers and ask you to place them anywhere on the body, front and back, where you have felt menstrual cramping when using contraception. The stickers are different colors, each for different methods of contraception. First, let's have people who are using pills, or who have used them in the past, come get a yellow sticker or stickers and put them anywhere on the body where you have experienced menstrual cramping.**

**Jacinda:** Is menstrual cramping the different in a way from your baseline?

**Interviewer: (30:34) It's anything, yes.**

**(30:35-30:48 Silence.)**

**Interviewer: (30:48) Then the next color we have is green and this is for injections, any injectable contraception. For implants, we have blue. If you're using implants, now or in the past.**

**Respondent:** Is an IUD different?

**Interviewer: (31:16) The next one.. the implant would be like….**

**Respondent:** That's the Nexplanon one, right?

**Respondent:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Interviewer: (31:24) Then a non-hormonal copper IUD is purple. The hormonal IUD is red, and then any other hormonal methods, we have orange. Let me know if you need me to review the colors. Those (31:52 unclear).**

**Respondent:** Copper IUD was purple?

**Respondent:** Yes.

**Interviewer: (31:55) The copper IUD is purple.**

**Respondent:** This is if we've used it any time in the past?

**Interviewer: (31:59) Yes. As many stickers as you want.**

**(32:05-32:32 Silence.)**

**Interviewer: (32:32) Then we have one more sticker, which is a gold star. This time I want everyone to take one gold star and place it on the body where the menstrual cramping bothers you the most.**

**Respondent:** Want our favorite menstrual (32:53 inaudible)? (Laughter).

(32:55-33:05 Silence.)

**Respondent:** (33:05 Unclear/whispering.)

**Respondent:** Yes (laughs).

(33:08-33:36 Silence.)

**Interviewer: (33:36) First, I see a sticker here. What are some words you would use to describe this part of the body?**

**Respondent:** Breasts.

**Interviewer: (33:50) Someone who put their sticker here want to tell me a little bit about their experience with cramping in the breasts? Emma?**

**Emma:** When I have my periods, my breasts get really, really tender and sensitive. If I'm doing physical exercise, if I'm carrying something heavy, it can hurt. I get a lot of breast tenderness during periods.

**Interviewer: (34:19) (34:19 Unclear.) Thanks, Emma. Now, I see quite a few stickers here. Would we call this more than one location?**

**Respondent:** Yes.

**Respondent:** Yes.

**Interviewer: (34:31) What were some words to describe this area higher up in the…**

**Jacinda:** Stomach.

**Interviewer: (34:41) "Stomach".**

**Sam:** Abdomen.

**Interviewer: (34:43) "Abdomen". Thanks, Sam. For those that put stickers here, tell me a little bit about what your experiences were like with cramps in the stomach or abdomen.**

**Respondent:** Shooting pains. Some of it feels like muscle cramping and then some of it feels like menstrual diarrhea cramping, so actual digestive. So, I think its just both of the areas combined, basically.

**Ivy:** I get bloated. I feel pain (laughs).

**Interviewer: (35:24) Ivy says, "Bloated and pain."**

**Ivy:** Yes, there's a lot of pressure in your stomach.

**Interviewer: (35:30) Other thoughts on what experience you've had in this area?**

**Emma:** Personally, I think the cramping is… I was pregnant before and I had the baby kicks, like that stabbing feeling during pregnancy.

**Interviewer: (35:55) I see a gold star up in this area. Someone who put their gold star there, tell me why cramps here bother you the most?**

**Sam:** Yes, I put that there.

**Interviewer: (36:06) Sam?**

**Sam:** I think just what I said before, the combination of everything happening at once. I have other digestive issues, so it makes that worse. I have a little bit of nerve pain and stuff too, so that makes that worse. But its like everything firing off at once.

**Interviewer: (36:29) Thanks for sharing that. Now, what about this area of the body? What are some words that you would use to describe where these stickers are? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** Groin. The uterus.

**Interviewer: (36:48) Anything else? We're nodding.**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (36:54) Then someone who put their stickers here, tell me about what were your experiences like for cramping in that area: uterus, groin?**

**Ivy:** For me, even when I'm spotting, it feels like I'm cramping all the time. I'm constantly swollen or bloating. It never goes away, its constant.

**Interviewer: (37:17) Thanks, Ivy. Others?**

**Emma:** For me, I get really bloated and stay bloated even after my period is gone. I get really painful cramps in the very lower abdomen side and kind of feels like it comes up to my uterus and farther down, depending on how bad it is, it can get a little bit toward the beginning of my thighs. It feels really pulsing and really warm there too. That's probably where it hurts the most.

**Interviewer: (38:02) Several gold stars here too. Someone else who put a gold star there want to talk about why this bothers you the most? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** That's just where it feels--- It's all radiating. I can just feel like my uterus contracted. It feels somewhat akin to being in labor. I don't like that reminder. (Laughter.)

**Interviewer: (38:36) Anyone else want to talk about why that area?**

**Emma:** Sometimes it makes you feel like you want to go to the bathroom, even if you sneeze, it's just bad (laughs).

**Interviewer: (38:54) Then going to the back of the body, what are some words that you'd use to describe this part?**

**Respondent:** The lower back.

**Interviewer: (39:04) "Lower back". Someone that put a sticker there want to tell me about what that experience is like?**

**Ivy:** Did I put a sticker there? (39:17 Unclear.) I was going to say that's pretty close to the stomach area, more dull and achy. Again, it's hard to tell with muscles and digestive stuff so close together in there (laughs).

**Sam:** Sometimes I feel like I straight up threw out my back and I just tell myself I didn't. (laughs).

**Interviewer: (39:55) Anyone else?**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (40:00) Then our last area, what are some words that you would use to describe this?**

**Respondent:** Butt, anus, rectum.

**Interviewer: (40:12) Yep, thanks Sam. Someone who put stickers there want to tell me a little bit about that experience?**

**Sam:** That was also me. Sometimes it feels really electrical shooting pain in that area, like knotted in the butthole, it's awful. But for me it isn't as persistent as some of the other stuff. I'll just feel it every once and while. Yes, its terrible and intense but it's not long lasting.

**Interviewer: (40:46) Thanks, Sam. Anyone else? Ivy?**

**Ivy:** I get swollen. If I have to do the number two, it hurts, and I do bleed.

**Interviewer: (41:02) Final thoughts on the bodies? We're going to leave this here.**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (41:08) Thank you for sharing all that. How do you manage your menstrual cramping?**

**Ivy:** My boyfriend bought me a heating pad because I don't like taking medicine (41:19 unclear) (laughs). Because I've seen that when I do take pain medicine, it affects my mood.

**Interviewer: (41:26) Thanks Ivy, heating pad. Anything else?**

**Emma:** I use Midol, Tylenol. I do use heated pads or heated socks stops quite often. I have a heated weighted blanket I use as well.

**Interviewer: (41:57) Emma, so a heated weighted blanket, and some Tylenol or Midol. Others?**

**Jacinda:** Same with me, I'll take salt baths, massage. Sometimes Ibuprofen if I need something stronger.

**Interviewer: (42:25) Any activities you avoid doing? We talked a little bit about that for here. Maybe taking a day off work. "Avoiding physical activity" we heard. Anything else that you would add to the management of cramps?**

**Sam:** I usually don't exercise as much.

**Interviewer: (42:51) We talked about this a bit already, but just to sum up, have you had less or reduced cramping and pain while using contraception?**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (43:00) Jacinda says, "Yes." Others?**

**Ivy:** I had more cramping than previously, I got more cramping.

**Interviewer: (43:05) Ivy got more.**

**Jacinda:** I never experience cramping.

**Interviewer: (43:14) Others? Emma?**

**Emma:** When I don't have a period for months, I have way less cramping than normal. When I do have a period, I feel like I have a lot more cramps than I did before contraception.

**Interviewer: (43:35) Now for the next few questions, let's look back at all the ways that contraception has changed your menstrual cycles that we have here on this wall, and all the places where you've had cramping on your body, and how that impacted your life and you. What information did you get from the clinic or your healthcare provider about the changes to your menstrual cycle, all of these changes, before starting the method that you are using? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** I also took the pill for 15 years, being a teenager until II had kids. I don't think I barely received any information at that time. When I started the Mirena, I think my OB/GYN did say, "Some women do experience less bleeding," so some women do find that it like improves their quality of life.

**Interviewer: (44:54) Was that information helpful?**

**Jacinda:** Yes. Actually, it turned out to be accurate for me.

**Interviewer: (45:05) What about others? What information did you get from your clinic, your healthcare provider about…**

**Ivy:** I only got the information from the packet prior to starting contraception and I was okay with it. I have had weight gain, and it's been harder to lose the weight that I've gained (laughs), but besides that, the doctor didn't tell me a lot. (laughs).

**Interviewer: (45:36) Thanks Ivy. Other thoughts on information that you got. Did you get any information, Emma?**

**Emma:** I did, but I started birth control in middle school and I haven't been talked to again since then, so I don't really remember. So, I don't think I was really informed much at all. I didn't start it by going to primary care. I was in in-patient treatment, so they kind of were just like, "This would help you," so I think that's probably all I remember from that time. Then it hasn't really been reviewed since. Very little.

**Interviewer: (46:24) What about you, Sam? Information on changes?**

**Sam:** When I first started, I was one of the people who was just given a depo shot in middle school for no good reason. It was awful. Sorry, I have my phone on silent, but my kids can override it. Okay, yeah, I wasn't really given much information, and then also nothing to deal with anything like you know, any of the effects I was having from it. Later on, I asked a lot of questions about it, so I probably got more information from providers than what they're just giving out. But it has gotten better over the years, as far as the amount of information. Usually, a pamphlet and then just some details about how it might affect different areas of life. Also, it affects everybody in different ways, so I think it's a little challenging to say if it do this or that. Definitely not enough information at first.

**Interviewer: (48:02) Now think about all the things we've talked about so far. What do you wish they had told you about the changes before you started taking the method? Emma?**

**Emma:** I think definitely how it could have affected my periods in general. I think in the very beginning, I

had experienced no periods for quite a while, and then about a year after being on it, I started the whole having a period every couple months at that point, bloating. I was semi-aware of the mood parts of it. I mean I was just originally on it so early. Definitely just the variation of how it affects you physically would have been nice to know. And then I think probably the ways it changes how your period looks visually. I remember it being really shocking to see the color difference and the consistency difference when I was younger. That's probably hard for me to think back since it's been quite a while.

**Interviewer: (49:25) What do others think about what you wish you had been told more about in terms of the changes? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** It was hard to parse it out because I really was not told how much the insertion of the IUD, and I know that's not what you asked, but it was so much worse than… They were like, "You might feel a slight cramping," and I almost passed out. I had me kept for an hour for just observation. It was really bad, so much so that by the time my IUD had to be replaced, they were like, "Oh, it turns out now we recognize how painful that can be, and so we do offer general anesthesia or sedation for that procedure." So I opted for that, but the first time, when they first put it in, I bled for like six weeks straight, really heavy, so much so that I called the office at least once, maybe twice to ask if that was normal. They were like, "Yes, that's typical." I was like, "Okay, you could have said something," and then I wouldn't have had to call. But uh yeah, I was not prepared for that.

**Interviewer: (51:06) Other thoughts on what you wish that they told you more about?**

**Ivy:** It would have been nice to know how it affects you in the event you miss your birth control pills. When I missed it, I went to the pharmacy, I can get my period really fast compared to some weeks where it's like, "Oh, I can go three days without it," and a period will start, but part of the issue is when I miss the medication, then I go to start it. My medications don't start before my period again until almost two to three weeks out. It'll be a heavy flow, a really heavy, painful period for two to three weeks before the medication starts fully regulating it again, so that's really nice to know that ahead of time so I could make sure it never happens. So I guess the effects of when you'reoff of it and the consistency while you're taking it. I've been taking it for 9 years or so it definitely has caused some changes.

**Interviewer: (52:28) Thanks, Emma. Any other thoughts over here?**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (52:39) What is the most important information you would want friends to know about these changes? If there was one thing.**

**Respondent:** Definitely cramping. (laughs).

**Interviewer: (52:53) There'll be some cramping.**

**Emma:** In my opinion, just be ready to not understand your period for a while. Once you start, you have to learn a whole new system of preparing for when you have a period and when you don't. Just try to be ready for whatever all ends up happening, to not try to expecttoo much.

**Interviewer: (53:19) Thanks, Emma. Other thoughts?**

**Respondent:** The mood changes.

**Interviewer: (53:27) The mood changes.**

**Respondent:** I think Emma summarized it really well. You're going to have to wait and relearn how your body adapts and know what the new normal is for your body.

**Interviewer: (53:54) Any other things, Sam any other things to add?**

**Sam:** Just that it is different for everybody. When I am given information, it's like, "Oh, this is weight neutral, or improves mood…," and then I have the exact opposite effect. And so it starts to make you feel… Not now at the age I'm at and I'm more confident in myself. But I think it can feel really exclusive like, "Oh, is there something wrong with me? Because I'm reacting differently to this." It can feel isolating and weird.

**Interviewer: (54:31) You're not experiencing the changes you were told you might.**

**Sam:** Yes, and then it can be also a little panic inducing like, "Oh wait, why is this happening. Like is there something actually wrong with me, medically?," but really, no. I mean, there could be (laughs), but a lot of times, it is like no, you're just not having this reaction that some people have.

**Interviewer: (54:58) Thank you for all of that. There's one more last activity. For this final activity. We're going to talk about two questions that healthcare providers or researchers may ask. Sometimes ask people about their cycles, so I will ask you each the question and then we'll talk about it. The first question: when you last had a period, would you describe it as "light", "moderate", or "heavy"? Please raise your hand if you would say "light".**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (55:41) Jacinda said "light", I'll have you… Do you want to stand up? Just stand on that side of the room. We're just going to move our bodies a little bit here. If you would say "heavy"?**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (55:56) Emma said "heavy". Over to this side of the room. Then the rest of you, would you say "moderate"?**

**Sam:** Is it the last one we've had or the last time on contracpetion?

**Interviewer: (56:10) Just the question as you read it, yes. When you last had a period.**

**Sam:** I would say "moderate".

**Interviewer: (56:15) "Moderate", so then you're going to be over on that side of the room, Sam and Ivy. How did you decide on your answer? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** I mean, its all relative. Based on what my experience was. Like before I had what it was like as a teenager. Even when I was taking the birth control pill for 15 years, I felt like it was pretty typical compared to prior to using it.

**Interviewer: (56:58) Sam and Ivy, how did you decide on your answer with "moderate"?**

**Ivy:** Mostly my period is very moderate. It's been heavier before and now I just have to use a regular pad.

**Interviewer: (57:21) A regular pad. What about you, Sam? How did you decide?**

**Sam:** Just relative to my own experiences, and not really on how much menstrual blood there was. There are fewer or more days on my period than usual. Not “than usual”, but than other periods that I’ve had. I don’t know the range as far as how much blood it was. I don’t know. For some people, it might have been heavier. I definitely would…I still use tampons and pads for about 3.5 days.

**Interviewer: (58:20) Then Emma, how did you decide on “heavy”?**

**Emma:** I prefer to use pads, and my last period, I think on average, I had to use the overnight ones for how long I was at work. I think it was about three of those. My last one was more intense than previously. I’d say on average, I would still use one of the heavier-flowing pads. I feel I go through two or three of the overnight, depending on how long it had been since changing my last one.

**Interviewer: (59:09) How long ago was the period that you were thinking about when you answered this question? Could you raise your hand if it was within the last month or two?**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (59:17) Sam, Ivy, said a month or two.**

**Sam:** The one that we just responded with?

**Interviewer: (59:23) Yes. Oh, and Jacinda, a month or two. About three to six months ago? Emma. Okay.**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (59:33) Now, was there anything about this question that made it difficult to answer? Emma?**

**Emma:** My period really varies depending on the length, so I felt it was hard to give a straight answer for a lot of the questions. For this one, it really depends on if the birth control gives me another period.

**Interviewer: (60:00) Others find any reason why this question was hard? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** I think I know my and experiences of women in my life, which it’s hard to quantify how heavy their periods are, but they're--- One my best friends and my mom a few years ago were using a tampon and a pad and still having to change them every hour. That I consider to be… That’s what I think of as really heavy, but I also realize that if you don’t know anyone to have that experience, then that’s not the scale you are using.

**Interviewer: (60:42) Others? Sam?**

**Sam:** I would say I’ve just had so many periods in my life that I’m not really you know, committing to memory. Like I’m not remembering all the details of my period, I guess, so yeah.

**Interviewer: (61:02) Now one more question. Feel free to sit down or keep standing if you’d like.**

**(61:08-61:23 Silence.)**

**Interviewer: (61:23) Some healthcare providers and researchers may ask you: on the heaviest day of your last period, how many pads, tampons, or other materials did you need to use to collect or absorb your bleeding for that day? Please raise your hand if you would say you used one.**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (61:51) No one. Two, three or four?**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (61:55) Ivy, Jacinda, Sam. How about five, six, or seven?**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (62:08) Let's see. We did have some variation. You're in different groups. Why do you think people in your group had different answers to that second question? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** Because there are many different pads and tampons. There's a variety in the amount they can collect, so if I'm using pantyliners, I'd have to change them more often than if I'm using a super ultra pad.

**Interviewer: (62:45) Anything else to add?**

**Sam:** Sometimes you might take a tampon out for other reasons than it just being full, maybe like if the string dipped in the toilet.

**Interviewer: (63:00) Was there anything about the second question that made it difficult to answer?**

**Emma:** For me, I had issues with some of the pads that I've used before and are supposed to hold a lot of blood but then it feels really uncomfortable after a certain amount, so I think it kind of depends on what kind you're using. You can get to feeling fuller where it feels like you've been wearing it for too long, even though it hasn't absorbed as much blood as it is intended to, so I think that made it a little hard.

**Interviewer: (63:44) Thanks, Emma. Any other thoughts why something might be hard to answer?**

**Ivy:** I think just the hormonal changes for everybody.

**Interviewer: (64:04) How do you think someone would answer if they use something other than a pad or a tampon? Emma?**

**Emma:** I don't really know. (Laughter.) I know there are a lot of options that I don't use.

**Interviewer: (64:25) Sam, did you have something to add?**

**Sam:** I've tried to use a Diva cup before, and I could not get it inserted so it seemed like it was clean. For me personally, I'm not sure if that is what was going on, but whenever I used it, but I followed all the directions but it just had like a smell to it, so it just wasn't something I wanted to do anymore.

**Interviewer: (64:54) Sometimes people have very small amounts of bleeding and they may not even use any menstrual pads, tampon, panty liner, or other material. What words would you use to describe that type of bleeding?**

**Ivy:** Spotting.

**Interviewer: (65:07) "Spotting". Ivy, thank you. Anything else? "Spotting".**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (65:18) What does the word "spotting" mean to you?**

**Ivy:** For me, it's you went into the bathroom and you wiped, and you see blood. That like when you go to the bathroom and then urine has blood, but not in your underwear.

**Interviewer: (65:36) Sam?**

**Sam:** It means you're going to spot on your underwear, but it's not going to leak through. So, I would just wear my dark, not good underwear in that time, or something like that but I'm not worried about my pants or dress or whatever I'm wearing.

**Interviewer: (66:01) How do you choose whether or not to use a product?**

**Emma:** Like pads?

**Interviewer: (66:09) Yes, if you're spotting.**

**Emma:** Personally for me, I guess what I base it off of is like how bad I feel cramp wise and if I physically feel more tired then it hints that my period is going to start and more heavy bleeding is coming and I feel spotting once my period is actually going to start. So I guess if I find a little bit of blood, then I start to use panty liners and when I notice my cramps and symptoms getting worse, I know to switch to heavier pads.

**Interviewer: (66:58) Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** I think it depends on if its at the start or at the end. If it's at the start, then I wouldn't know if it's going to get heavier, so then I'm probably going to wear something. If it's at the end and it's tapering off, then I'm pretty sure that it's not going to get worse.

**Sam:** For me, it just depends on what I'm doing. I could not be towards you know completely tapered off, but I might just choose not to wear anything. It just depends if I'm at home or if I'm out and about or if I might or might now wear pants for some reason. You know. Yes, that would help me decide. If it's at the end, then I'd maybe put on a panty liner or like a whole pad.

**Interviewer: (67:56) Thanks, Sam. We're getting towards the end. We have another section here. You've been very helpful in answering (68:06 unclear) these two questions. In this next section, we're going to talk briefly about sex and sexual relationships. I want to restate what I said at the beginning. I acknowledge that this can be sensitive or uncomfortable for some people, especially in the setting where we don't know each other well. You do not need to share anything you're not comfortable talking about. You can always step out or we can skip this section altogether. Ready to continue?**

**Respondent:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Interviewer: (68:37) We have two more things that healthcare providers or researchers may ask people using contraception we want your opinion on. Sometimes healthcare providers or researchers want to know about whether or not you have had sex recently. For some people, this is a sensitive topic and may be hard to talk about, so how would you like to be asked if you had sex or not?**

**Respondent:** (69:04 *Laughter*)

**Interviewer: (69:06) Reaction? Jacinda?**

**Jacinda:** They can ask me, "Do you consider yourself sexually active," or something to that nature. It doesn't really pry into like "when was the last time…". I don't know. It feels fine.

**Interviewer: (69:29) Sam?**

**Sam:** I'm a really open person and I prefer not to be asked. I think it's irrelevant sometimes. Just give me the information and maybe offer, "If you don't need this, let me know and we'll stop and not go into it." Because with questions like that, I have a lot of opinions being pushed onto my own situation. That weren't medically necessary opinions.

**Interviewer: (70:03) Thanks for sharing that, Sam. Other thoughts? Would you like to be asked? Not like to be asked? How you'd like to be asked, anything that comes to mind.**

**Ivy:** I don't mind (laughs).

**Interviewer: (70:14) Ivy doesn't mind.**

**Emma:** I don't necessarily mind it, it just depends on the situation. I go to a separate doctor for like women's health, so when I'm seeing the doctor... I don't know, like what I prefer them to say, but I don't think there's a way I would have preferred them to ask or anything. I' more open with women doctors and if it was a male provider. I'd want it to be very open, not wanting to get really specific but more broad if it was a male doctor and it was needed to be asked at all.

**Interviewer: (71:07) Any final thoughts on this question?**

**Sam:** Yes, I think it depends on the provider too, and relevancy.

**Interviewer: (71:15) Can you say more about that? What providers?**

**Sam:** What their specialty is. I haven't had any providers that have asked that completely out of context, like a podiatrist or something. (Laughter.) Just comfort level, I guess, with the provider and why they're asking is important.

**Interviewer: (71:52) Some context on what the question is for. Thank you. Healthcare providers and 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? Any reactions to that question?**

**Respondent:** Can you repeat that quickly?

**Interviewer: (72:17) Yes. They sometimes ask whether or not you've used a second method of contraception.**

**Ivy:** Personally, I haven't been.

**Interviewer: (72:29) Any thoughts on being asked that?**

**Emma:** Personally, I feel like that's a follow up question and when the awkward part is out of the way at that point. But I've never been asked that.

**Jacinda:** I can't recall if I've ever been asked that. Now that you're asking the question, it does raise my… like if you are asked that, arethey inquiring about something behavioral?

**Interviewer: (73:12) What is that mean to you or suggest?**

**Sam:** I feel like that's where the judgement comes in, is for the second question, I think. Because I've had situations when I'm asking for birth control, so like I'm capable of deciding if I want to be on it or not so I don't know why instead of providing me information or like if I decide not to be on it, I'll be like, "What else is it doing?" and then it will start feeling… "Because you don't want to get pregnant." And I'm like "Oh, I don't?" It all started just because I inquired about the birth control like I haven't also weighed what might happen If I'm not on birth control. That's where it feels it's almost controlling. It's feeling invasive, sort of taking away from--- Or attempting to you know like take away from our right to make our own decisions.

**Interviewer: (74:26) Any final thoughts on this one, second method?**

**(No audible response.)**

**Interviewer: (74:33) Thanks for sharing all that. 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 menstrual cycles while taking contraception that we did not talk about yet today?**

**Emma:** How long consistently we've been on it. I definitely noticed the longer I take it, the longer I go with having no period. I've been taking mine since the end of middle school/beginning of high school, and I feel more--- I take the same one. I'm upping it more often as well, and I'm also having way less periods than maybe a year or two ago. I'd have it every other month, but now it's almost three or four months without it. So I guess adding your experience depending on the length of having contraception.

**Interviewer: (75:43) Thanks, Emma. Anything else you think we should know that we didn't ask about?**

**Jacinda:** I don't know if this is relevant. Based on my age, and the age of a lot of people, perimenopause is like a hot topic. I have no, like I have asked my provider like because of my birth control, my periods are very light, how will I know if I am entering perimenopause? And, I don't feel like I've gotten a good solid answer to that.

**Interviewer: (76:27) Thanks for sharing that. Anyone else? What do you think? Final thoughts?**

**Sam:** I feel like how other medications interact with birth control. Also like clearing up misinformation about how antibiotics affect contraception. (laughs) And I know some things aren't true and I don't want to give anyone medical advice but there are some that believe the myths.

**Interviewer: (77:08) To clarify, are you saying these are things that you would want providers to talk about?**

**Sam:** Yes.

**Interviewer: (77:16) Misinformation on their medication, whatever they're on.**

**Ivy:** I had a urine infection when I was on contraception, and I was not paying attention to my body (laughs), so I ended up in the ER. They gave me Cipro, and they didn't ask… like I have the implant.

That's when I told them that I felt worse with this medication, because I was on just for one day and I felt like it was a whole lot worse than the urine infection. They had to what medication I was taking. They need to tell them to be aware to let them know if you get to the ER that you take contraception.

**Interviewer: (78:13) Thank you all for joining your discussion today. I'm really grateful that you shared your thoughts and your experiences and opinions with us. This information will be extremely helpful to our study. I'm going to stop the recording. Today is September 3. It is 7:11 p.m. and this is focus group 30-03.**

(End of audio.)