

[Theme music plays]

lone: 0:16 Hello.

Alice: Hey.

lone: It's the second episode of the podcast! I am lone, I'm Polyester's founding Editor-in-Chief.

Alice: I'm Alice and I'm the guitarist in Dream Wife but I'm also producing this podcast so, welcome to Episode Two. It's like the awkward second album! This is our awkward second episode.

lone: It's true, and you haven't even done the awkward second album yet [Alice laughing]. We're getting through it. Everyone who's listened but not liked or subscribed, I'm coming to your house [Alice laughing]. I'm going to make you press that button. Since we recorded the first one we've had the podcast launch at Melissa which was fun.

Alice: I think it was really great to touch base in real life with all these people that are actually coming together to make this podcast happen.

lone: Yeah and I think having all of the conversations, as in all of the recording and stuff, and then watching how people react to that has been fun. Hearing that people have listened to it while they've been doing their art homework is...

Alice: Yeah!

lone: Very cute.

Alice: Yeah people listening while they're like painting... [to Bella] did you do that?

lone: In the bath... Shout out Esme [all laughing].

Alice : Bella's here as well, Bella's like our guest producer right now.

lone: Yeah for this section [Alice laughing]. I feel like we should think of something to say at the beginning like -

Alice: What like a little catchphrase?

lone: On podcasts like sometimes they say like, oh one thing they've liked seeing this week or something, or one thing they're excited about or something like that.

Bella: Oh yeah that's cute.

Alice: I just watched this movie the other night called The Truth about Killer Robots... [lone laughing] which was really terrifying but it's about like robots that have basically lost control on the factory line and crush people against walls, and it's just really scary, you know, AI taking over and it not actually being safe.

lone: Alice wants you all to turn your Alexas off.

Alice: You can basically hack an Alexa with ultrasound so just get rid of them. But what about you?

lone: I started watching Russian Doll, with Natasha Lyonne, who is the most perfect woman.

Alice: What did you say, she's a coder?

lone: Yeah, she works for a games company. I haven't finished it yet, but I'm actually scared of walking downstairs at the moment [Alice laughing] because from watching that TV show. There's a spoiler, but it's where she falls down the stairs repeatedly. Every time I go for a step. I'm like am I sure, am I sure? [Both laughing]

Alice: You step back! [lone laughing].

lone: I *do* take a step back! Natasha Lyonne, if you are listening, come and be on the cover of Polyester! [Alice laughing] You will love me [both laughing]. So we may as well get into it, this episode of the podcast, like the whole series of the podcast is supported by Melissa shoes. If you listen in last week, you will know we have a discount code which you can use at shopmelissa.co.uk to get 30% off its MELISSAPOLY30, all in caps. And as we already mentioned since our launch party at their galleria last week, we're even more excited to be partnering with them for the project.

So onto the first section of this episode, we're talking to Polly Nor. If you just have been on the internet in the last three years you probably know who Polly Nor is, but she was also our Issue 8 cover girl. Polly's doing our obsession section, which is the section in which an artist or creative person talks about something that they're obsessed with that has nothing to do with their practice. Something that I really like about Polly and I think that's quite obvious in her work as well, is that she can communicate ideas in a way that is so I mean, I hate to use the word relatable, but also relatable. Yeah, like it really gets you but it's quite simple and not veiled in like, any sort of snobbery or anything like that. I really appreciate that about her work, and every conversation I've had with her including the one for this podcast, I definitely feel like I've taken something from it. So even though you know we had quite a fun time doing this podcast, I think that she is also extremely an insightful woman.

Alice: She's going to be chatting to us about her obsession with matchboxes.

Ione: And her own vintage matchbox collection. Here it is.

Polly: 03:57 Hello.

Ione: Hi.

Polly: Hi.

Ione: Who are you? [Both laughing]

Polly: Polly

Ione: Polly what?

Polly: Polly Nor

Ione: What do you do? [Both laughing]

Polly: Um, I'm an illustrator slash artist.

Ione: Yeah.

Polly: Maybe I'm an artist? ... Okay this has started well [both laughing].

Ione: Well, everyone should already know how you started being an artist cause you were on the last cover.

Polly: Yeah.

Ione: So if they don't know who you are then... that's their own fault. They should buy the issue [both laughing].

Polly: But they can't buy it anymore!

Ione: Yeah it's sold out, but... I'll put it up for a download [both laughing]. So, what are we looking at?

Polly: My match box label collection.

Ione: And why do you collect matchbox labels?

Polly: I guess I just like the pictures. But I started properly collecting them when I'd go to New York. And people have them in the front of the restaurants quite a lot, so I started just collecting ones of places that I'd go to.

Ione: Why do people just give matchboxes away in America, they don't do it here?

Polly: I think it's just like good advertising I guess? Although -

Ione: No one even smokes in America anymore.

Polly: I know. Also everyone just uses lighters.

Ione: That's true! [Both laughing] Pretty true.

Polly: But, uh...

Ione: Why are the older ones just labels and not boxes? I don't really get it, and why are they paper and not card?

Polly: I think they're just easier to store, so like the real geeks will have them all...

Ione: Oh so they'll just sell the labels themselves?

Polly: No, they store them in books, so they'll like cut them off, I think. I think that's why, I just don't even really know. But yeah, now they always sell them like that, and I'd originally bought them and was planning to like, buy my own matchbox and stick them on, for displaying them, haven't got round to that yet.

Ione: In your house?

Polly: Yeah.

Ione: All the older ones are quite similar colours to your actual work.

Polly: Yeah.

Ione: Like red, well it's actually just aged paper -

Polly: All of them tend to be like red, black and yellowy.

lone: What was the year when you first started collecting them?

Polly: Um, I've think I've started like buying them for the last few years on eBay.

lone: How many years is few?

Polly: Three or four?

lone: Nice.

Polly: Yeah, but basically just as a... kind of art collection. But it all costs maximum of £1.32 -

lone: Really?

Polly: - per thing. Yeah.

lone: What, even the really old ones, they're really cheap?

Polly: Yeah, I think so. I don't think I've spent more than £1.99 on them actually.

lone: What sort of eras are the oldest ones that you have?

Polly: This one... I was actually like, today, I was thinking like "fuck I should actually find out", and I was trying to go back on my eBay -

lone: You can't look at old eBay listings, it's really weird.

Polly: I know, that's so annoying! Sort it out eBay, but this one's from the 1940s.

lone: Really?

Polly: And I think, yeah, apparently. Some of them I just visually like, so I've bought them because I like the picture. So this one is a picture of a rose. I bought that one because my sister's called Rosie.

lone: Nice.

Polly: And then... this one with a key on it. It's like me and one of my best friends met each other because we thought we had the same key at school, that could let us into both houses, it just looked the same [both laughing].

lone: Don't all keys look the same?! [All laughing]

Polly: Yep. But we really were like "oh my God, we've found another person with the same key".

lone: Did you try it?

Polly: We were like "oh we'll have to go to each other's houses, see if it works", it didn't work.

lone: How long did it take you to dispel that myth?

Polly: Yeah pretty quickly [both laughing]. It was a life lesson, that all keys look the same. So I picked that one because of that. Punch, my dad collects puppets.

lone: Nice.

Polly: And he does a Punch and Judy show. He's a puppet maker and mask maker and stuff, so he collects lots of puppets, which is probably where I get my collection thing from.

lone: What do you mean collection thing?

Polly: You know, into these weird, geeky things [laughing].

lone: It's not that weird, I feel like quite a lot of people collect something.

Polly: I don't know that many people that do, other than my dad and my mum. My dad collects all sorts of weird stuff, but he lives in America and every time I go over there I'm just like "oh you got a new collection". Egg cups for a long time, like all different kinds of egg cups, and then like tin toys.

lone: Tin toys are quite nice.

Polly: Loads and loads of really creepy puppets.

lone: Did you collect anything as a kid?

Polly: Not really, other than Beanie Babies, I had loads of them.

lone: What have you done with them?

Polly: I think they're under my bed.

lone: Some of them are actually worth stuff you know, just letting you know.

Polly: I know, did you see that picture? I don't know if it was true or if it was just a meme, it was like a couple dividing all their beanie babies in court [both laughing], it was so good. That wouldn't be me. Did you have when you were younger have like those matchbox dolls that you'd like wish on? Worry dolls, you're meant to tell them your worries, and you'd put them under your pillow.

lone: Yeah wasn't allowed them.

Polly: Oh, why? Cause they cast spells?

lone: Cause magic, yeah [Polly laughing]. You don't wanna fuck with bad magic.

Polly: That's true.

lone: So what was your point though?

Polly: Maybe that's where I started liking them, I dunno, I remember I also had like, this may sound really weird [laughing]...

lone: No one's really expecting you to be the pinnacle of normalcy! [Both laughing]

Polly: Do you know what willow plants are? Do you know what willow plants are? [Laughing]

lone: [All laughing] Yes, I know what a willow plant is.

Polly: Yeah.

lone: Yes [all laughing]. For goodness sakes.

Polly: So I liked, do you know that they have like those furry bits on them?

lone: Yeah, like little round bobbles?

Polly: Once, I had two that I took from a willow plant.

lone: Yeah.

Polly: And I used to pretend they were mini hamsters [all laughing], but I had like, I had a little matchbox that they'd live in. So maybe, I didn't know

Ione: [Laughing] That they'd live in?!

Polly: That they'd live in, yeah.

Ione: What happened to the hamsters?

Polly: They were there for ages, I actually, I kept them at my dad's house and I found them quite recently and they were still in there, they looked fresh as well.

Ione: Did you bring them back?

Polly: They were called Hermione and Ron.

Ione: Were they?

Polly: Yeah [all laughing].

Ione: I didn't know you liked Harry Potter?

Polly: I liked the books, I'm not like, not a crazy fanatic. But...

Ione: Why do you think you were drawn to stuff like this as well?

Polly: I guess it's a way of collecting art but having enough space to put them up, because they're tiny or like it's thing that you can like easily find if you're abroad. I think I like them that they're kind of symbolic of certain things. Unless it's just one that I just love the design, I'd always be looking for something that would remind me of something else or I guess like tattoo art, like kind of symbolic stuff. Small symbols that would like be representing something of your life, I guess.

Ione: Do you think you translate that over into your actual work? A lot of people get tattoos of your work.

Polly: Yeah I think kind of a mixture of that but I also think that when I'm looking for them I'll I'll kind of go for ones that maybe remind me of my art a lot, so if you see this one it's like a fight between a character and then a red animal which here, is a snake and a tiger, got snakes in my work too.

Ione: Yeah it's like a big, beefy man, who's wearing a... leaf? Or a toga? [Polly laughing] And a lion.

Polly: Yeah.

Ione: There's loads of rats.

Polly: Yeah there are rats, also because some of them, you'll buy them, and then they come with like others.

Ione: Why?

Polly: I dunno.

Ione: Do you think they're all real, you been sold some fakes?

Polly: No, I think when I bought one, on PayPal, it'll be the same address, so I think it's like people selling their whole collection. They'll have like rats on one page, like snakes on another page. I think people just try and collect like rare ones. And kind of in the same with art where there's lots of people that will buy art because it, they think it will be worth something at some point, and then there's people that buy it, because it kind of like triggers some sort of emotional importance for them, but I'm not really collecting these for money [both laughing]. I don't think they'll ever be worth anything. I guess this is an example of like, ways of buying art that isn't just really expensive. People go to exhibitions and buy like postcards instead of buying like prints, which cost like £2.

Ione: Why do you think they're all quite like, quite a lot them have quite dark shit on them. Like there's like a dagger here...

Polly: Yeah.

Ione: And then obviously Punch, he's not a nice man. And the snake and the lion fighting.

Polly: These are the ones I've picked, but then in general, I do think they all are quite like dark imagery. Um, I guess it's like more sexy isn't it? In some ways I guess it's like the match is like quite a sexy thing that is sort of dangerous, I dunno.

Ione: Do you think you'll just give them away one day or do you think you'll take them to the grave?

Polly: Hm, I really don't know. I don't sound that passionate about it, so... [both laughing] ...maybe!

Ione: The one thing this has made you realise is that you don't like -

Polly: I fucking *hate* matchboxes! [Both laughing] Nah I'm into them, but I think for me it's more just like a visual reference.

lone: What would be some tips for people that want to get into collecting things?

Polly: I guess pick something that's quite cheap [both laughing] ... um and also easy to store which is why these are good.

lone: Why do you keep going back to the storage thing?

Polly: Cause no one's fucking got any space in London, do they? I feel like art people, like *art* people, with my art that I sell they're always like "oh you need to do bigger pieces, you need to sell prints bigger". And it's just like...

lone: Where are people gonna put them?

Polly: Yeah, the main thing for me if I'm buying like prints of people is that I can fit it in my room, which is *not* very big, so um that's why I would buy small artwork.

lone: How often do you buy new ones? Are you constantly looking or do you just remember every now and then?

Polly: I've been buying them loads more recently -

lone: Why?

Polly: Because I've done my exhibition [laughing], I definitely have like, an online shopping addiction which is like made better when it's me buying things that are £1.39 instead of me buying clothes which is also a big obsession of mine, is buying like lots of trainers online that I'll fuck up in a couple of days.

lone: I don't really think about you as like, someone who wears a lot of trainers though.

Polly: I'm not a sneaker head [all laughing]

lone: "I'm *not*!"

Polly: I'm not a hype beast, but I do, I do like buying trainers, yeah.

lone: Just love buying things.

Polly: Yeah. I feel like I'm always like, on the look for something online and I get very caught up in like, looking for the next thing. With these £1.39 is fine, it's allowed.

Ione: I think the reason that I like buying old things is because it makes it feel a little bit more special as well.

Polly: Yeah I mean, you feel, I would feel like I'm the only person that has these but I know there's lots of people -

Ione: Yeah same.

Polly: - lots of people who have these [laughing].

Ione: Yeah that's why I feel like with my stuff as well.

Polly: Yeah also what's really nice is that when you buy them, they come in the post like as a letter so, very rarely get posts these days that isn't bills.

Ione: What does everyone think of you collecting these?

Polly: I think most people get it, my mum collects weird stuff.

Ione: What does she, oh yeah, doesn't she collect like -

Polly: Rust.

Ione: Yeah.

Polly: She collects rusted metal, yeah. A lot of it [all laughing]. At the beginning it was like "oh yeah", like I kind of get it, I get that it's like interesting to look at, like often it's like sheets of metal and I guess it's like eroded in a way that looks like a piece of artwork. I do get it, I feel like it may be cool in like a gallery, our house is like got shit everywhere [all laughing] and when you come into the house she'll always be like "ooh, hope you've got your tetanus jab!" [All laughing]

Ione: Do you think you're a hoarder?

Polly: Yeah, I would say that I am a hoarder.

Ione: But you've just had to move house, so has that made your hoarding...?

Polly: It would have cut down the amount of stuff I had to have if I didn't have my studio which I've just expanded.

lone: Oh yeah [both laughing]. You expand your studio every two months.

Polly: Yeah, every time anyone leaves I'm like "umm, I'll take your space!", so I've started off with like a really, really tiny space which has got bigger and bigger. Now I'm doing like more sculpture stuff the kind of space I need is bigger, but then I like do all these shows where there's huge... arms and stuff.

lone: But then you'll buy tiny little artwork?

Polly: Yeah, well because I'm, it stresses me out that I have to find storage space for these huge arms that I keep forever and then yeah, so my room I just have tiny, tiny, tiny artwork.

lone: I need to buy one of your period poos.

Polly: Oh yeah, I was meant to give you one for your birthday and I forgot [laughing].

lone: Well, I'll see you tomorrow with a period poo! [Both laughing]

Polly: You can have one.

lone: Thanks mate. You trying to write a book?

Polly: Yeah I'm trying to write a book.

lone: Yeah?

Polly: Yeah.

lone: What's it about?

Polly: I recently did a series of like 39 images of this like a devil under the sea. Um, I was meant to also be trying to like think of some other short stories to go along with that -

lone: So it'll be a book of short stories?

Polly: Yeah but then the book, the story that I've got really into writing is like really fucking long.

lone: That's okay.

Polly: I don't think it could be in a short book but...[laughing].

Ione: How long is it?

Polly: Like pages and pages and pages of like loads of plot.

Ione: Yeah but can't you just...?

Polly: I can't draw all that.

Ione: Serialise it.

Polly: [Laughing] It's going to have to be have to be a series, an animated series.

Ione: No you could serialise it in like comics.

Polly: Maybe, but it's like lots of dialogue.

Ione: Yeah, all comics have lots of dialogue.

Polly: No, like crazy amounts.

Ione: [Laughing] Yeah just make it a TV show.

Polly: Yeah it's weird it's kind of got like, [laughing] this really intricate plot like kind of like a Black Mirror episode which is hard to...

Ione: Maybe you should ask Charlie Brooker if you can do an animated episode, he'd probably let you.

Polly: Guys, if people ever search for me this is gonna be the only thing that comes up on podcasts, [laughing] is me talking about matchboxes.

[Theme music plays]

Ione: 17:01 That was Polly Nor. If you're one of the only people on the planet that does not follow her on Instagram you can keep up @pollynor, we'll link everything below. I'm going to try and get the Issue 8 cover feature up so you can see because the pictures are really amazing. I just love Polly I'm like her biggest fangirl ever, so...

Alice: Yeah, just check her out.

Ione: There we are.

Alice: For the second part of this podcast, we're going to be entering into the Ask an Expert section which...

Ione: This week takes more of a like non-artistic turn. Because last week, obviously we had Nadine throwing a party, this is kind of more serious. But I felt like the way we've approached it is not so serious. We're speaking to Ruby Rare, who is a sex expert, she works for a charity called Brook, which is a great charity especially for young people to get resources, but she explains all of that. Anyway, we're talking to Ruby specifically about all of the myths and confusion and everything like that surrounding contraception because I felt like, especially women that are maybe in their 20s or even going into their 30s like contraception is very confusing, because it seems that attitudes towards it has changed even within us growing up. Before you just went on the pill, and then you you were on it, like I was on the pill for six years, maybe even longer, I don't know, six or seven.

But now we're having all these options opened up to us, but then also with that comes like a lot of misinformation, stuff that's still confusing, obviously healthcare professionals like your doctor are sometimes not the most welcoming people or the people that you'd like to seek advice from. So, Maggie Matic who we actually mentioned in the podcast last week, because she is quite a big part of Polyester now, she did a panel with us back in July, she's written for us, she's actually doing a PhD that includes some work about Polyester. She's going to be interviewing Ruby, and here it is.

Maggie: 18:51 Hi, I'm Maggie and I am an avid reader and lover of Polyester. I'm also a researcher and writer completing my PhD in contemporary feminist visual culture, and... that's about it. And I'm joined today by the lovely Ruby Rare who's going to introduce herself.

Ruby: So my name's Ruby, I am a sex educator, I work for an amazing charity that works with young people to help them with sexual health and help educate them. And then I also do lots of work with adults, so my primary interests are around pleasure and sex toys and porn and dating and basically all the things we don't tend to talk about as much as I think we should. And I also run a body positive life drawing class with my wonderful naked friend Rosie, where participants pose nude or clothed or somewhere in between, as well as us posing. So... that's me!

Maggie: Great! Well, we were really keen to kind of speak to you a little bit more about different contraceptives that are out there, because I think there's so much conflicting information, and it can be really hard to find resources that are helpful, and getting second opinions can be really difficult. So I think we wanted to kind of have a discussion about that today. And we can sway into various different topics that that intersects with.

Ruby: Contraception is like my bread butter butter, so I can talk about this stuff forever.

Maggie: Great. Well, I don't know that much. So I mean, maybe that's good, because I am genuinely quite unaware of what's out there. We just thought it might be quite good to start with a conversation, I guess, around different attitude shifts and changes in the discourse around contraceptives. And if you could chart the way it has been

discussed historically, and if there has been any shifts recently that you've seen in the conversations around that.

Ruby: Yeah, well, recently, the biggest shift that I've noticed is the drive and conversation around male contraceptives, it's something that lots of people are wanting to talk about more. And there are certainly loads of people who are keen to get different forms of male hormonal contraceptives and non-hormonal ones on the market. Historically, since the 60s, contraception has been such a female issue and there is a real expectation that women and vulva/vagina owners need to take the responsibility for contraception, which is very unfair when you think that most people who are having sex and hetero, there is going to be a risk of pregnancy and a risk of STI transmission. Everyone who's involved should have a responsibility for that.

So one thing that I'm enjoying is seeing more of a conversation around STIs. Because when people think contraception, the first thing that comes into everyone's mind is pregnancy. And that happens when I'm talking to my mates, that's happening when I'm going into a youth club and talking to 15 year olds, it's always pregnancy, whereas the reality is that STIs are super prevalent, especially in London, and other big cities. It's a real concern that we don't talk about that often. While hormonal contraceptives are great, they don't protect from STIs. So that's why I'm a massive advocate of condoms, I actually run a condom distribution scheme that works across like five boroughs in London, and it's like a whole London scheme thing.

Maggie: So along those lines, and kind of part of the reason why this conversation I think is really important now, is that there's a lot of myths surrounding different contraceptives. And we wondered if we could kind of run a few of the common ones by you? But one thing that I've noticed is that maybe the Mirena coil seems to be something that is viewed quite positively, you know, the hormones are localised, so it's less likely to have an effect on your mood, mental health, that kind of thing. And you obviously don't have to take a pill every day and that as well. *But*, there is kind of conflicting information around whether it does impact on your mental health. And we wonder if you knew anything about that?

Ruby: One thing that's really upsetting about working in sexual health is the lack of solid information that is available to professionals and then available to the general public, it's still an area that people are slightly afraid of. So in all forms of sexual health, whether that's contraception or pleasure, whatever it is, I just constantly run up against things where I can't give a solid answer because there hasn't been adequate research that has been put into this sort of money, time, effort. There is a gendered aspect to it as well, because we're often talking about female bodies, and people are less inclined to research female bodies, which is bullshit, obviously. I have information that's anecdotal, and I have information where I've spoken to clinical professionals who work with contraceptives. It *can* have an effect on some people's moods. But it's really difficult to track whether or not that's something that's going to happen to you or not.

Maggie: Yeah.

Ruby: This has happened to a couple of really good mates of mine as well, who have taken some form of contraceptive, whether that's been a pill or a coil, so the Mirena is a coil, like you were talking about implants, lots of different types of hormonal contraception, and haven't linked that to a shift in their mental health, because we're very quick to think about the physical effects. And it's only recently

that we've really tried to bridge that gap between mental health and contraceptives. If it's something that you're concerned about, that are non-hormonal options, and so I tend to recommend non-hormonal options when I think that's something that will work for someone.

So there is the Mirena, which is a coil that has a low level of progesterone in it, but there is also several different types of IUDs, which are copper coils. It's the same procedure to insert it, they're put into the uterus, people always think that coils are way bigger than they are as well. Uteruses are really, really small unless they've got a baby in them, so it's actually not as big as you think. They can be a really good option for people if they're worried about their mental health because you've still got the longevity of them, they last 5 or 10 years. But because you're not putting any hormones in your body, it's far less likely that you are going to have like an effect on your mental health.

Maggie: Okay, cool. My experience, I don't use any contraception anymore, because I'm in a relationship with a woman and I don't have to, which is great, and quite easy. But when I did, and when I kind of became of the age when I could take the pill, that was kind of a conversation that I was having with my mum or whatever, I went to my doctor. And because I had been diagnosed with the early stages of bipolar disorder, and I'd been in and out of the mental health services, my doctor was just like "I wouldn't feel comfortable prescribing you any kind of hormonal intervention". I thought that was quite interesting, because often it seems that there's not much of a conversation around that, particularly with health professionals.

And I thought that was maybe quite radical of him to make you aware of that potential side effects and then I did get the copper coil, and it didn't work for me, because it was really, really painful. I've spoken to quite a few people who have had a similar experience, and it's been quite painful and that kind of thing. I think that puts people off quite a bit. Is there any kind of guidance that you have around either copper coils or other forms of contraception that are lesser known?

Ruby: So there are two different types of copper coils, the 10 year one and the five year one, and there are different brands, but the five year one that's the most common is the Nova T, and that is slightly smaller. For me, I was on the Nova T for five years, and I had a fucking whale of a time, I loved it, it was like my best friend, I got on with it really well. And then a couple of months ago, I got that taken out, and I had the 10 year one put in. And similarly to what you're describing, I had a terrible time for like, two, three months, I was in a lot of pain, it was only when I had it removed, that I really, fully acknowledged how much discomfort and pain it was bringing into my life. I also felt like it was a massive kick in the teeth, because I've been advocating for copper coils for five years, and then suddenly it sort of fucked up my own body.

Our bodies constantly change, and the thing that is exciting and can also be a challenge, is that the contraception that's right for you is going to change as well. It's never something that you are fully settled into, it's always an adaptive process, and something that you're going to have to review. One thing that I would recommend, again, if it's not a good idea for you to take hormonal contraceptives, I have a very good option for you in a second, something that I'm hearing more and more positive things about is the hormonal ring. So people call the NuvaRing, it's like a squidgy ring that sits at the top of the vaginal canal, so just underneath the cervix. Because it's localised, it has a smaller dose of hormones, so people *can* report less side effects. It can be immediate, so if you put it in, after a couple of hours, the hormones have sort of been taken into the body and you're protected from pregnancy. But if you don't like it anymore, for whatever reason, you can take it out yourself, rather than like, having to go back to a clinic and having a procedure.

There's also a big thing around pain, like pain tolerance there, because I've got quite a high pain threshold. And so for me, being able to go through a procedure of having a coil inserted or taken out wasn't the end of the world. Whereas for some people, that's really going to be a barrier for them, and that's okay, you just got to know what the right thing is for your body at different times.

The best thing that I can recommend is *condoms*, because condoms are amazing! [Both laughing] I love talking about condoms, we need to chat about them more, because they feel a little bit out of fashion right now, and I'm not quite sure why that is, because at the end of the day, they're the only contraceptive method that's protecting you from STIs *and* from pregnancy. I have now been using condoms for four months or something, so since I got my coil removed, and I'm having a really, really good time with them. This happens with all different types of contraception, the myths that you were talking about, we are so influenced by all of these misconceptions that we hear from our mum and our aunties and our older sisters and like and then also clinical technicians as well, who can be quite misleading. The doctor that you were speaking to sounds great -

Maggie: But that's rare.

Ruby: And yeah, it's rare also, I've heard experiences of professionals not saying "this *may* have an effect" of saying "it *will* have" or "it *won't*" as well. You've got to be really wary about the language that you use, just in terms of planting information and expectations in people's minds. And when when you take away the whole like, ridiculous thing of like condoms - they ruin the mood, they take too long, bla bla bla, they're honestly, a really, really good option, and they're great in terms of using them for sex toys as well.

In terms of sexual health, with two people having sex who both have vulvas, dams can be a really good thing to use, or gloves as well. I think people get freaked out by them, because it feels a bit clinical, but there are ways of making that sensual and normal. I've just personally really enjoyed experiencing what that's like, and when you put that as part of the conversation that you have with all your sexual partners, it becomes so much easier faster. And it's also a good litmus test, because if someone doesn't want to put a condom on when they are going to sleep with you, it's a really good indicator that they're not going to be the best person mentally, maybe physically to have in your bed, because that's not a supportive attitudes to go into any form of sex.

Maggie: A few people were talking about the articles that have been floating around at the moment about the seven day break, and taking a break from the pill, and whether that is good for you, whether it's unnecessary, whether it's better, to be consistent, and to take your pill, you know, all the time and not take a break or like all these different frames through which that's being discussed at the moment. And I just wondered what your take was on that?

Ruby: It's a shame that moral conversations influence science, because my instinct is to believe what the NHS says until they change their stance, because the NHS is fucking amazing. If you're listening internationally, people in the UK are so lucky, that we are able to access sexual health services for free through the NHS. My mates in the states have such a hard time trying to start these conversations with medical professionals. The NHS is often recommending that a break is a good thing, but I've heard different things from different people, there's just so much

uncertainty. I've spoken to nurses and doctors who have said "yeah, it's fine if you just want to, like keep rolling it over, then whatever, it doesn't have a big difference", and then other people who believe quite strongly against that. I don't really know right now, I'm inclined to go with what the NHS website is telling you, and if it's something that you are concerned about, then there are progesterone only pills, like the mini pill, where you do take it continually.

If what you want is a pill where you're just going to get into that routine and take it every day, then there are pills that are advised to be used in that way, so I would think about changing the contraceptive so that you are sure that you're kind of doing right by your body as kind of medical standards currently are stating, rather than taking it into your own hands a bit. I love that more and more people, especially in the kind of sex positive feminist world that is my Instagram feed, people are talking about contraception more. But there is a risk with that, that all of these anecdotal experiences and opinions inform someone's opinions of themselves, when in reality, like you have no idea what the effect of a contraception is going to be on you, especially if you're just basing it off someone else. And lots of people do a good job of kind of saying, if you want to get sort of sound medical advice, you go to these places the charity that I work for, Brooke, has a really good website. It's aimed at people under 25, so the language is really clear and concise, and it has a good breakdown of different types of contraceptives.

But there's a part of me as a professional that's like "aaah, I really want you to put a big disclaimer of like, *this is my personal experience, this isn't for everyone*". And also people can feel really raw about these things. I can talk about my experience with this second coil now, a couple of months later, and I'm much more calm and relaxed, whereas at the time, I was having a fucking terrible time. And if we've been recording this then, I probably would have struggled to be more objective about my experiences with it, so you've also got to be wary of where someone is in their journey with contraceptives because that can really influence other people as well.

Maggie: Like you mentioned before, when we have conversations about contraception, the conversation usually steers towards avoiding pregnancy. But there's so many other conversations that we ought to be having, one of them being around STIs, but then also for people who have periods, and that can really trigger or induce gender dysphoria. And I wondered if you could go through some of the options for trans masculine and non binary or gender queer people, and why they might want to take contraceptive pill or have any of the coils fitted.

Ruby: There are lots of different types of contraception that don't have to be inserted into your genitals. So for some people who have gender dysphoria around owning a vagina, I wouldn't necessarily recommend a contraceptive like the vaginal ring or the coil where there has to be a procedure that is around that area of their genitals. The implant might be a good option for a long acting contraceptive, because it's in someone's arm, and it can kind of feel like a slightly separate thing. Again, that might be positive for some people that might not be positive for others.

The main thing that I would recommend is, and again, unfortunately, because professionals don't tends to get loads of good training about gender, making sure that the professional that you're going to have a chat with is going to be inclusive and positive about your gender and your identity. To walk into a room, particularly in those medical settings, that can be a really triggering thing for people when there are medical records that might have a gender that you don't identify with, or don't identify with all of the time. I would like to see more people trained so that they don't feel flustered or surprised when this sort of conversation comes up. And obviously, we're having this conversation in London, there are clinics that are more friendly to non binary people and trans people, I guess it gets harder the further

outside of a city you go to, so it might be worth having a journey somewhere so that you can actually have a relaxed, transparent conversation

Maggie: Following that thread, when people have conversations online or in person about what contraception might be best for them, a lot of people say it's really good to get a second opinion so not just taking the first opinion that you get, but that can be quite difficult in the NHS because you kind of have a GP and can be difficult to see different people. So, outside of the traditional healthcare services, is there any accessible or affordable places that you can go to for advice or any other ways of navigating the system that you would recommend?

Ruby: I would really recommend the Brook website because it outlines different types of contraceptives that are available to people, and also gives a bit more of an indication of saying like some of the positives and some of the negatives of them. And there are lots of websites and blogs and vlogs of people where they're outlining this as well. So Hannah Witton does loads of really good work around contraceptives on her YouTube channel, but it's just making sure that those things are factually accurate. So I rate Hannah, because she's a Brook ambassador, and she like really knows her stuff, so she is one of those online presences that I think people can rely on.

You've just got to be careful about where you get the information from. But even if it's having conversations with friends, not about their own experiences, but just of saying "right here are these three types of contraceptives that I'm thinking about, here are the pros and cons for me, for each of them". And just getting someone else that you know, to say "oh, well, it sounds like this might be a good thing, because remember, when you had to take antibiotics, and you like, never finished them? Maybe that will happen with the pill." [Both laughing]. That kind of information can be helpful.

Maggie: When you're going to your doctor to seek advice about what might work for you, what's a good set of questions to ask?

Ruby: One thing that people should be asking is, "if I don't like this method of contraception, how long should I wait until I come back here?". Lots of people can freak out after a couple of weeks and want to get something removed or want to stop something straight away, and actually, you might need to assess it for a slightly longer length of time, so I would recommend that. Asking about if there ever any moments when that contraception would stop working for you. So for example, if you're taking antibiotics, if you get sick, and you're like throwing up or you have diarrhoea, that can change how the hormonal pills work.

A really good question to ask, and I made this mistake when I first had my copper coil fitted, if you're getting a long term contraceptive get the name of the contraception that you're using, like the brand of it, because I walked around for five years, and I'm a fucking sexual health worker [both laughing], just being like "I've got the five year copper one..?". I didn't know the name of it, and that can be really helpful, because then you want to look up some advice and get a couple of opinions online on forums and stuff, it's just a bit more helpful to have the specific type of coil or implant that you have fitted.

Maggie: Amazing. The only other thing we were interested in covering, especially because it's a conversation that is burgeoning right now on social media and various different spaces, is about the use of tracking apps, and how effective or ineffective

there are, what the benefits are of those, and if there's any risks, and what your thoughts are on using those?

Ruby: Those pesky, pesky tracking apps. I have had so many chats about these with my mates, I think because mates of mine *know* that I don't like them, they'll keep a bit quiet about the fact that they use them, and then it will come out at a time and I'll go "wait, what, you're, huh?!". I feel like really betrayed almost [laughing]. Tracking apps are a valuable tool in tracking your menstrual cycle, and knowing when you might be more fertile or when you're ovulating, but *I* don't think that people should be relying on them as the sole form of contraception.

People have different opinions about this, but the thing is, speaking as a young person who is not interested in having children, currently, you're just putting yourself in a slightly more vulnerable position in terms of making a decision about pregnancy. And for lots of people, conversations and choices about pregnancy can be an easy thing, but also for lots of people, it can be very difficult, and I don't want people to have to be in that position unless they want to be. They're never 100% certain, so it's sort of like "if you don't want to get pregnant, but if you got pregnant, it would be okay" then maybe that's like an option that you can go down. So some of my mates who are a bit older, use that because they feel like it would be an okay thing in their lives, right now. Overall, there's a lot of error that can happen, like, my cycle changes quite a lot as well, I go from a cycle that's 30 to 36 days -

Maggie: Yeah same.

Ruby: And so if that's happening -

Maggie: Yeah, how does it account for that?

Ruby: And also, I kind of don't like them in general, because of the the way that they marketed them, because they've marketed them really specifically to a target group of young women. And this might be speculation, but I think it's been put to white women a lot more, just from like the conversations I've had with friends about the advertising that they get on their Instagrams, and it's kind of seen as, like, an easy, quick fix thing. There was one advert on Instagram, that was someone checking their temperature in the morning after like a casual sex encounter, and they're like "oh phew, not pregnant, don't need to worry about that". Where's the conversation about STIs? That's so important. You're encouraging people to put themselves in a more vulnerable position, of not taking ownership of their bodies and their sexual health with this whole other side around infection that's as important as pregnancy. So I'm not, not a big fan, if I'm honest.

Maggie: It's very, like "be in tune with your body" and, like in a way vilifies intervening in ways that are important to intervene if that works for you. Like obviously, not everybody has to and that's great, but for some people, it's life and death and it's really important so I think -

Ruby: And having, like, I don't really enjoy the conversations that push hormonal contraceptives as an immediate negative, because yeah, there's not that much information about long term effects of them, and I am also wary of that, and made a choice to not use hormonal contraceptives for, like for now and for the foreseeable future, but that that doesn't mean that they're not a really good option

for lots of people. There are so many moments in our lives when some form of medication, whether that be hormonal or not, is a very important and empowering choice that someone can make, I feel like tracking apps sort of amplify that conversation in a way that doesn't make me feel super comfortable.

You can get all forms of contraception, including condoms for free on the NHS, and a condom is going to protect you from lots of different things, and also that contact with sexual health clinics and providers means that people are more likely to stay safe because they have a place where they can ask questions and they're sort of tuned into a medical system that can be very helpful for them. Whereas taking it in your own hands, and kind of just subscribing to get a thermometer and doing it all through your phone... who knows, in 50 years, I might sound like a total Luddite and that might be the way that we're all doing it but right now I'm wary of it.

Maggie: Cool! Thank you so much for coming!

Ruby: Thanks!

Maggie: And chatting to us about contraceptives.

Ruby: Can I plug my stuff?

All: Yes!

Ruby: So the charity I work for is called Brook, they're amazing, you should look them up. If you are living in London and you are under 25, please go on to correct.org.uk to get free condoms, you can get them all across the city and it's a really good scheme. Also have a look at Body Love Sketch Club, which is my body positive life drawing class.

[Theme music plays]

Ione: 42:52 That was Ruby and Maggie, obviously Ruby already mentioned quite a few of her own projects and social handles so we'll put the links for them in the description of the episode, and we'll also link Maggie and her research Instagram account because she runs a research Instagram where she talks about all the stuff she's been reading on her PhD that I think a lot of people would find very interesting. So this has been the second episode... done!

Alice: We made it through.

Ione: Fiiiiiiiiiiiiished!

Alice: We hope you enjoyed it, it's been really fun.

Ione: Obviously we have only done two episodes so far, any feedback you have on the episodes, any pointers, anything to add let us know you can email podcast@polyesterzine.com or you can just find us on Instagram, Twitter,

Facebook @polyesterzine on all of those, and maybe we can read some out or just see what you're saying.

Alice: Just get in touch, we want to hear your thoughts.

lone: As we mentioned the podcast is now available on iTunes, well Apple podcast store, I don't know the official term [both laughing].

Alice: Interchangeable.

lone: I'm not down with the lingo yet. It'd be great if you could like and subscribe and leave a review please, whether it's just a star one or you've got any words, you can also find it on Spotify and on the Polyester website hosted through Podbean and obviously I mean you're already listening to this now but please keep doing so! [Alice laughing] Thank you very much and, hopefully you know this by now, but Polyester is a bi-annually printed feminists cultural publication dealing with socio-political issues through an array of creative outputs. And as I said tag or comment below if you're just coming to this podcast out of the blue, you need to get onto the website, read the zine, find out what's going on in the world of Polyester

Alice: Tap into the zone.

lone: New episodes drop every other Monday, next one will be 4th of March, but on the 4th of March episode we'll be speaking to the founder of Disciples skincare who's an amazing #femaleboss lol, but aside from that she actually came to skincare through psychology and her whole approach to skincare is in a way that synthesises the mind with our skin and breakouts and obviously we're all stressed and all we hear about is millennial burnout. So we're going to speak to her, and see if that's true and whether buying fancy oils are actually going to fix our face.

Alice: Yeah, we've also got Chloe Sheppard, photographer and how would you say it, sister of Polyester magazine?

lone: Yeah.

Alice: Talking about her obsession with fan culture and all the things that go along with that.

lone: Chloe Sheppard will be revealing which male pop star she followed around the country [both laughing] so make sure you get those subscribes in so you can be notified when a new episode drops. And if you are leaving us a review or an email I'd also be very open to hearing TV recommendations. Let us know what to watch. So we've been your host, again I'm lone, I will leave my Instagram below so you can follow me and all my excellent shoe pictures.

Alice: I'm Alice and I'll leave my Instagram so you can check out all my guitars [both laughing].

lone: That sounds really phallic. We'd also really like to thank George Townsend-Teague who is the assistant at Polyester for helping with all the research for this episode and generally being on hand to assist us, thank you George. And we will leave George's Instagram too even though she doesn't use it that much.

Alice: What can people find on George's Instagram?

lone: I think she's just been like posting some pictures of some cute hair clips she's been making.

Alice: Hair clips, pictures of hair clips, there's something for everyone in this mix.

lone: Guitars, phallic things...

Alice: I also really like hair clips. I think it's all about the juxtaposition [lone laughing]. But yeah, thanks for tuning in again, and we'll see you soon.

lone: As always, the Polyester podcast is sponsored and supported by Melissa shoes, an excellent company that really help creativity thrive especially through the voices of femmes and young marginalised artists. You can find Melissa shoes at @melissaofficial, obviously we'll link all this below. We have a special polyester discount that will run for the whole series but also don't wait, get some shoes, with MELISSAPOLY30 and show us your looks with the hashtag #MELISSASQUAD all in caps.