

Shared experiences

Davina McCall

"I'm a reformed addict and I was waking up soaked in sweat... thinking, 'There's something wrong with me, I've got the flu or a virus or something'. It reminded me of when I was using and I really hated it."

Meg Mathews

"To me, the menopause was just Samantha in *Sex And The City* having hot flushes. There was nothing out there about... being anxious or overwhelmed, not sleeping or having aching joints and migraines. And I just thought to myself: 'If women knew all this, we would be able to share our experience more openly.'"

Emma Freud

"I went [to my GP] and said 'I think you should test me for Alzheimer's.' And she said 'Are you menopausal?' and I went 'Yeah' and she said 'Well it's that.'"

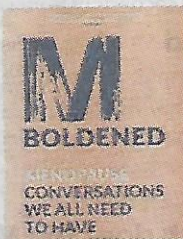
If we listen to its invitation, the menopause offers us an opportunity to discover who we are beneath the identities we have adopted, naked of biological drivers and shorn of the capacity to pretend towards youth.

The hormonal shifts of the menopause can embolden us. Some friends have come out, had wild affairs, declared themselves done with motherhood. I have felt fear fall away. Since that day when I stood humiliated and dripping in the sweat of my first hot flush, I've found myself running for Parliament and revealing my struggle with depression to millions on TV. It isn't that I've belatedly located a pocket of bravery, it's simply that I don't care any more. I don't care what you think of me.

Menopause is both a crisis and an opportunity.

But for too long it has remained hidden in the shadows. It is time that we begin to own it publicly for the rite of passage that it is.

This is an edited extract from 'M-Boldened' (The History Press, £20)



comes at the expense of the most mature thing film-makers could do: show diverse, real penises in a manner that holds no special meaning for the character or plot.

While *Spartacus* would lead you to believe otherwise, all gladiators did not have big penises. Nor did their penis size and shape have anything to do with their power, masculinity or sexuality.

Sigmund Freud supposedly remarked: "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar", which was meant to suggest that cigars are not always phallic symbols. It would be nice if

TELEVISION

Your starter for 10: how do you make a Covid quiz?

'University Challenge' had to be filmed differently this year. By **Adam Sherwin**

Your starter for 10 – how do you film *University Challenge*, the quiz show that famously invites teams to confer, in a safe environment during a pandemic that is having a disproportionate impact upon its student competitors?

"To say this has been the biggest challenge in *University Challenge*'s 50-series history would be an understatement. I can't think of anything comparable," says Peter Gwyn, executive producer of the BBC Two series.

Viewers will notice some "subtle tweaks" when Jeremy Paxman introduces Monday night's episode, the first to be shot under lockdown protocols at the Salford studios. Perspex screens will divide the students, who sit in two rows of four.

"Viewers are used to seeing screens now so hopefully they won't appear too jarring," says Gwyn. The students, who would normally turn towards each other to confer over follow-up questions, will now hear their colleagues through earpieces.

"They are particularly necessary during the music rounds when they need to hear each other over Rachmaninov blaring away. We test the sound levels before recording, playing raucous music to make sure they can hear each other over the top." Each contestant has the luxury of their own monitor for the picture question round, instead of sharing a screen with their neighbour.

An obscure rule – that a student cannot play if they were due to take their degree during recording – has been dispensed with due to the disruption to university examinations.

However some familiar faces from the 2020 series first round, completed before the March lockdown, will be absent. Some overseas players have been unable to return so those teams have played their reserve members.

Adapting to new health and safety protocols in time to resume filming last month required a formidable effort by the producers, ITV Studios.

Construction of the cumbersome

set in the studio had to allow for social distancing. "We divided the whole process into 15-minute intervals to work out exactly what each person would be doing," Gwyn says.

And preserving the 70-year-old Paxman was also a priority. Has the presenter been self-isolating? "We have a series of protocols for everybody and ways of managing Jeremy's participation."

Episodes – including the traditional Christmas celebrity specials – will continue recording until the end of the year, with a final block, taking the competition from quarter-finals to finale, due to conclude in early 2021. The producers had considered recording the show via Zoom, recreating the vertical team row effect by video tiles, if no studio production was possible.

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"We thought a Zoom version would have been difficult to watch with so many people on screen and it could collapse at any time if someone's internet connection went down," Gwyn admits.

The shows real stars, the students, have been "absolutely assiduous about sticking to the guidelines laid down for them and their determination to keep going has been very heartening," the producer says.

Tougher lockdown rules for the Manchester area may once again throw the recordings into doubt. But Gwyn is confident about crowning a 2020-21 series winner.

"Although the trophy will have to be sanitised thoroughly before it can be passed down the line by the team captain," he says. "We're already planning to start recording the next series in February. It seems a lifetime away, but hopefully we just go on and on and on."

'University Challenge' is on BBC Two on Mondays at 8.30pm



The contestants will be separated by Perspex screens