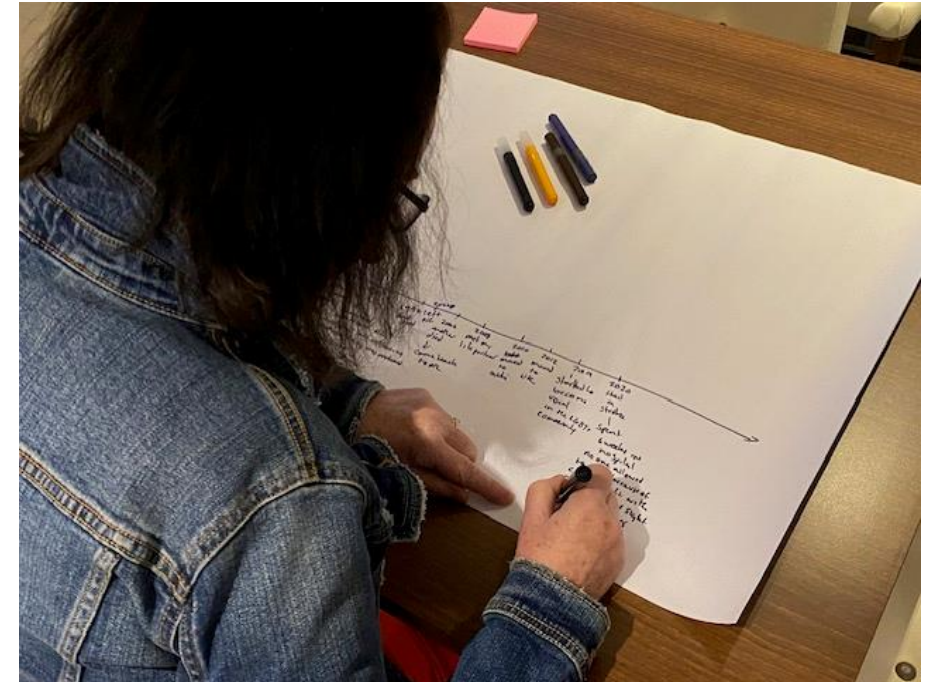


# Marking time: Co-producing an approach to timeline interviews

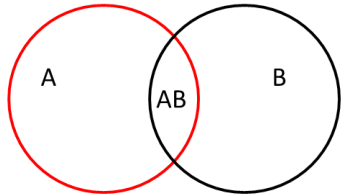
**Dr Mike Thomas/Dr Amy Prescott**  
**Department of Health Sciences**  
**Brunel University London**



# Project background



3-year £1.1m ESRC-funded mixed-methods project on socially inclusive ageing



Intersectional, life-course perspective to understanding ‘new’ ageing populations focusing on 3 target groups in the UK:



Qualitative workstream: capturing lived experience and aspects of socially inclusive ageing through timeline interviews (Adriansen, 2014). Part of a wider tradition of life story interviewing in social research

LGBTQ+ older adults  
Elders from racially minoritised communities  
People ageing with disabilities

**Today we report on a preparatory phase of the study where we asked older LGBTQ+ people to try drawing a timeline and give us their feedback (we provided shopping vouchers in recognition of their time and input)**

# **Timeline Interviews: Method of life history research**

# Timeline Interviews: Method of life history research

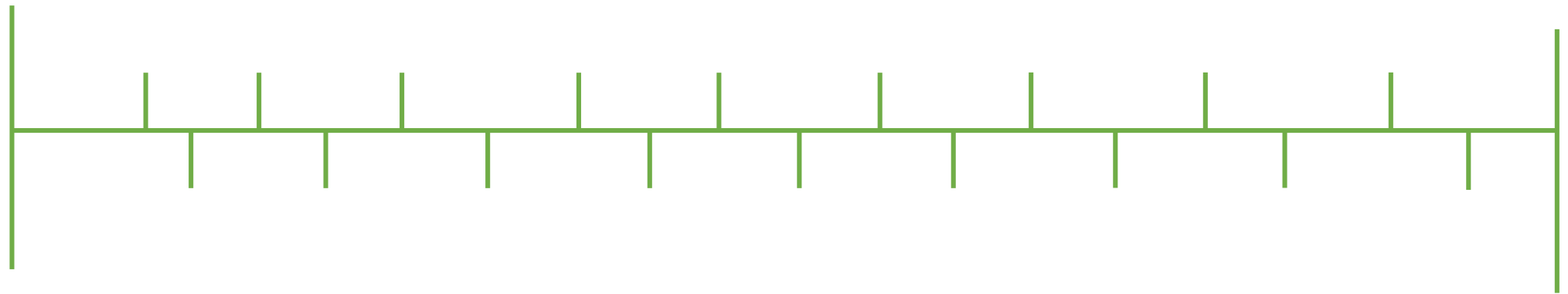
Use of a timeline as a focal point for an interview: as a visual representation of main events and milestones in an individual biography

Timeline as an 'organising principle' for a conversation, not as a rigid, linear tool

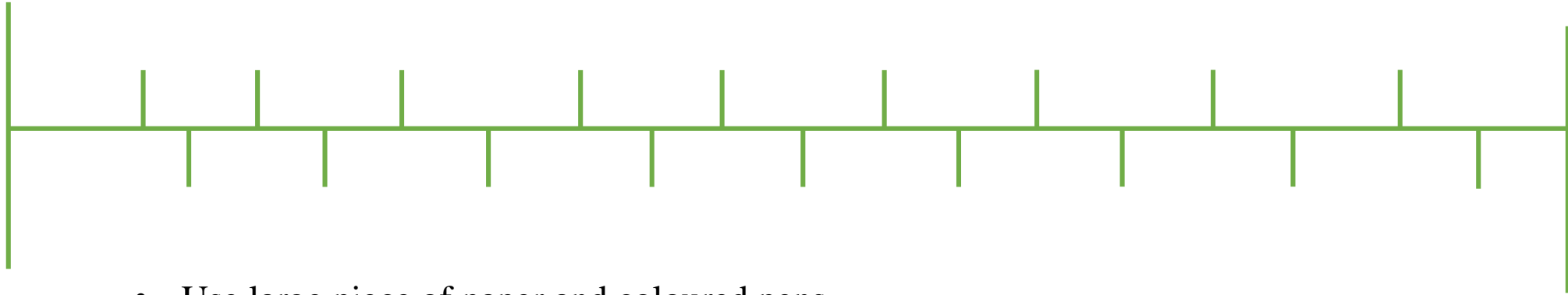
Collaborative effort between participant and researcher: potential for co-production

Potentially holistic- allows for life stories to be placed in context of wider historical, social, political context

## Timeline Interviews: How to do it?



# Timeline Interviews: How to do it?



- Use large piece of paper and coloured pens
- Start by drawing a line across the sheet to represent the timeline
- Initial Qs: ask about key events from individual life story; can begin from birth or key experience linked to the research topic
- Can also extend into an imagined or anticipated future
- Can add 'external' events that influenced biography
- Social, political, environmental, policy- possible identification of influences, causes and effects
- This means that analysis is a feature of the timeline interview, can also be added to afterwards alongside interview transcript
- Timeline as a resource for analysis alongside interview transcript
- **Member-checking becomes a possibility**

## Testing out this approach: Co-production events



# Testing out this approach: Co-production events

Session with older LGBTQ+ community groups in London (Spring 2023).

Session with members of a stroke clinic who identified as belonging to an ethnic minority group in London (September 2023)

Time spent building relationships with community groups and service users.

Trust is **vital**

Time spent introducing the project by researchers who were open about our identifying as part of LGBTQ+ communities.

We shared examples of our own timelines.

Asked LGBTQ+ group to work on their own timelines, given loose instructions about drawing a timeline, scope of the timeline period, using whatever formatting or colours they wanted.

Timeline interviews with stroke patients were conducted individually rather than a group setting.

Sought feedback afterwards.

Images in today's presentation are shared with their permission.





What did they look like?

# What did they look like?

**BORN** [redacted] OLDER SISTER + BROTHER REJECTED BY BROTHER THE REST OF HIS LIFE

GREW UP BEING DIFFERENT BUT NOT REALISING UNTIL AUBREY. WITH HINDSIGHT HAD BEEN ATTRACTED TO MY OWN SEX FREQUENTLY.

ABOUT 1950, AT SCHOOL YOU HAD TO DECIDE WHAT SUBJECTS YOU WOULD WANT FOR FUTURE CAREER.

LATH TEACHER RIG HERSELF OF ME BY SETTING ME FRASAGE OF EXTREME MEN WHO DIDNT GO TO GAIL WITH CREOSOTE - CAMPAIGN LEFT HER CLASS!

ALL TIME ~~1955~~ 1955-1958

KEPT HEAD DOWN

SEVERAL IDENTURED APPRENTICE SHIP IN QUANTITY SURVEYORS OFFICE IN EDINBURGH, UNBUILT

1968-1971

STAVED CIVIL SERVICE AS LOVELY TECHNICAL BUT VERY BLOODY APRIL 1968-26 CYPRUS 1966-67

1972

LEFT C.S. TO LIVE AND WORK WITH MY LOVER GEORGE IN DEVON

1980

GEORGE DIED VERY UNEXPECTEDLY OF ISCHAEMIC HEART DISEASE BOTTOM FELL OUT OF MY WORLD AND JUST GOT THROUGH LIFE AS POSSIBLE.

1980-96

WENT BACK TO LIVE WITH MOTHER AND ENDED AS HER CAREER. WE WERE ALWAYS GOOD FRIENDS.

1996-2022

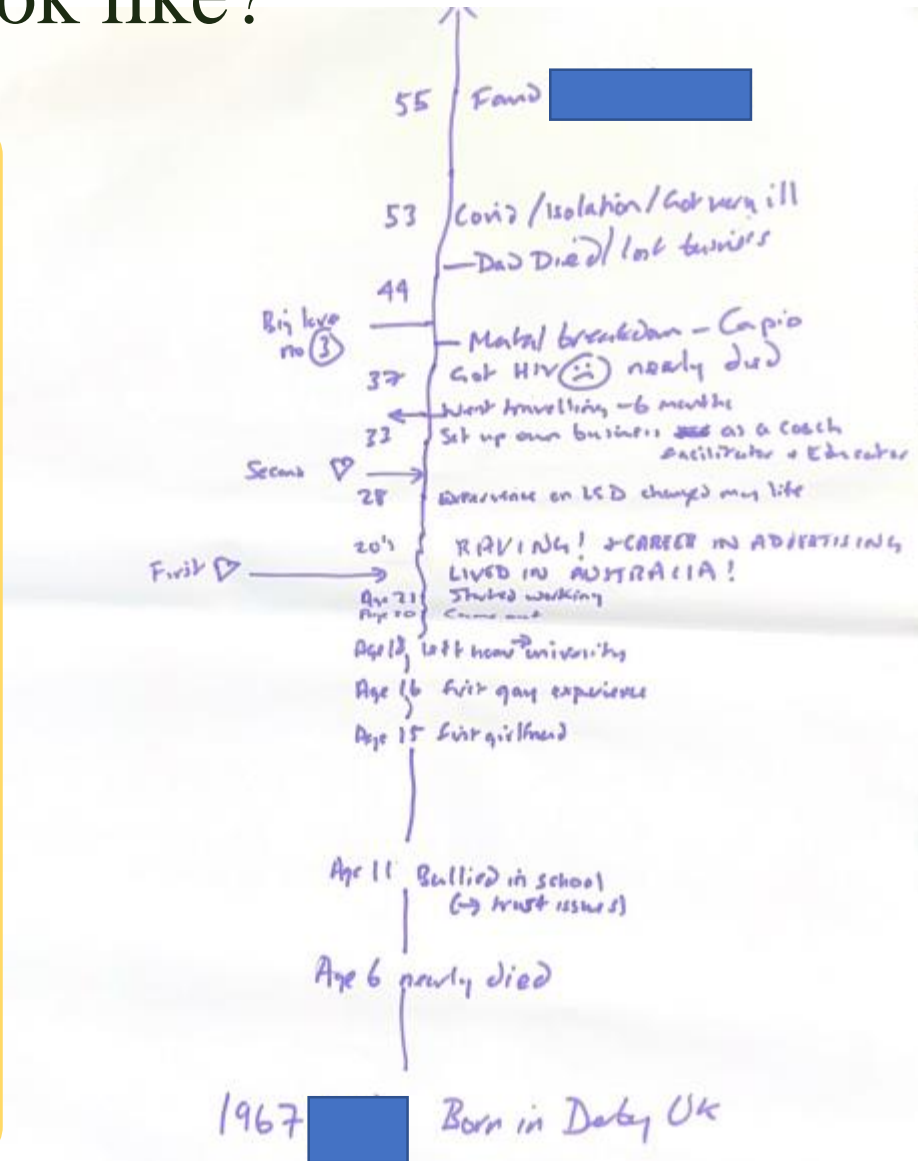
RETIRED TO N. LONDON VOLUNTEER AT SUBBERSHUFFERS (NICE) VARIOUS PART TIME JOBS TO 65 FULL RETIREMENT.

2022 - Today

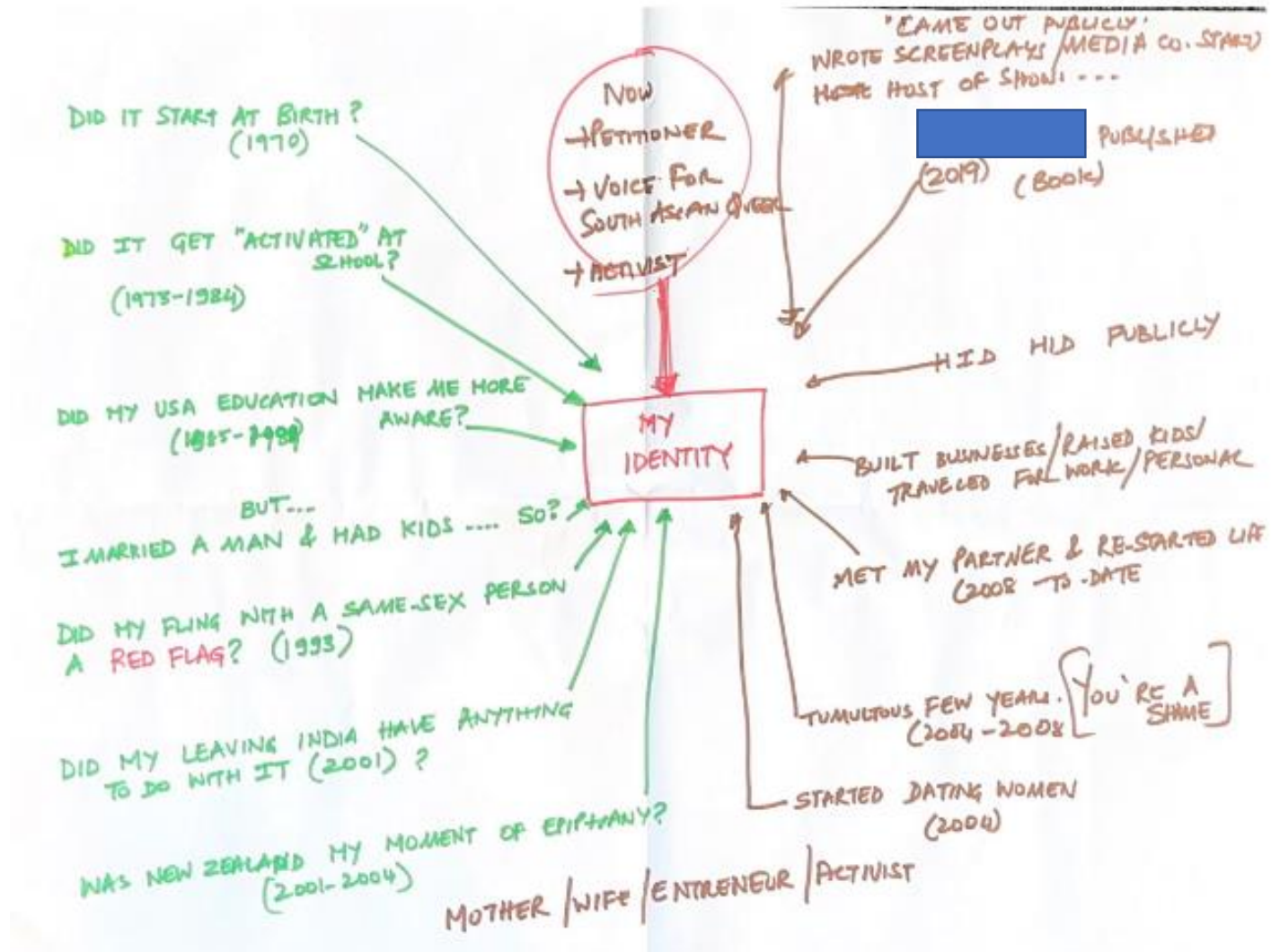
READ ABOUT [redacted] IN ODL SEND LETTER, THE EXPLOSION, FROM MEDIA FILMED ME THE CONVENTION OLD AGE SOUNDS I THINK I WOULD BE SMALL THAT PARADE ON 15<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY

Some took a linear, chronological approach

Here use of emojis, uppercase and exclamation marks seem to signify significant events



# What did they look like?

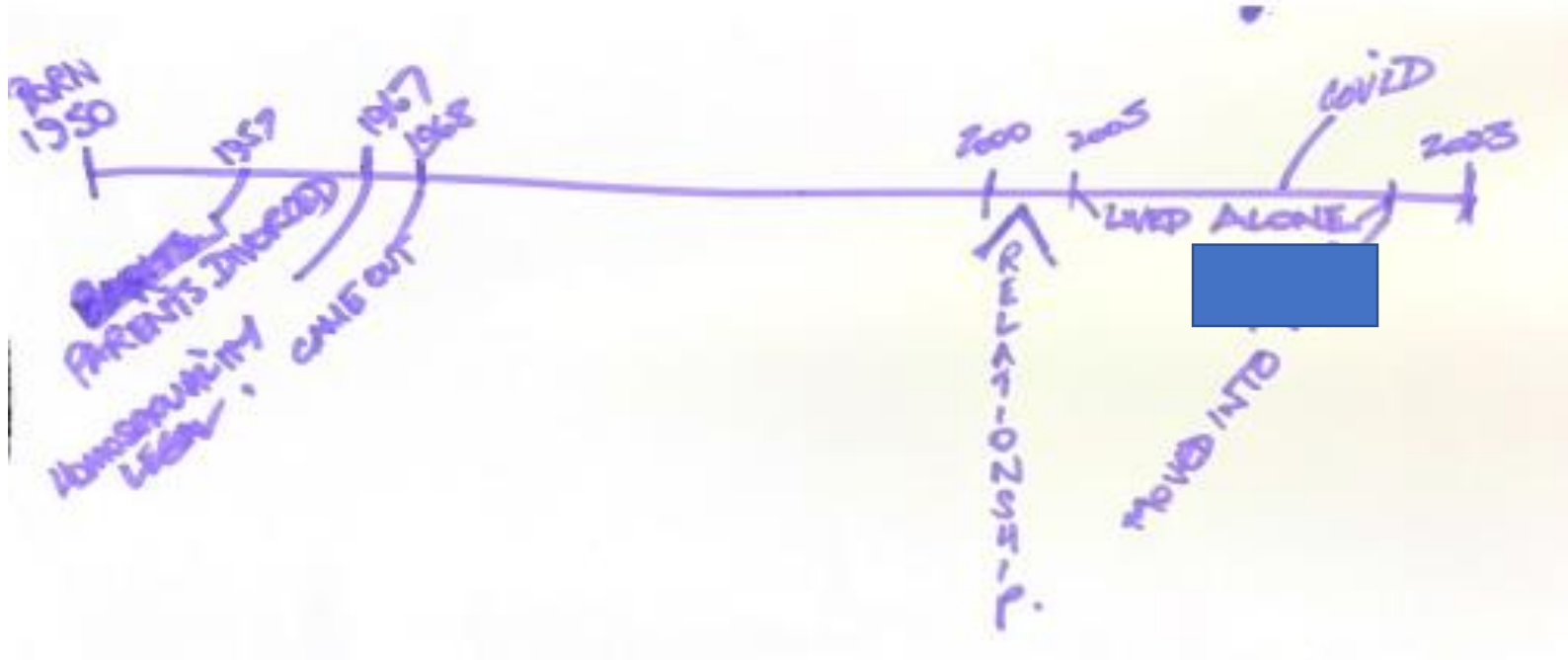


Is this a timeline?  
We can see lots of reflection here in this example

# What did they look like?



# What did they look like?

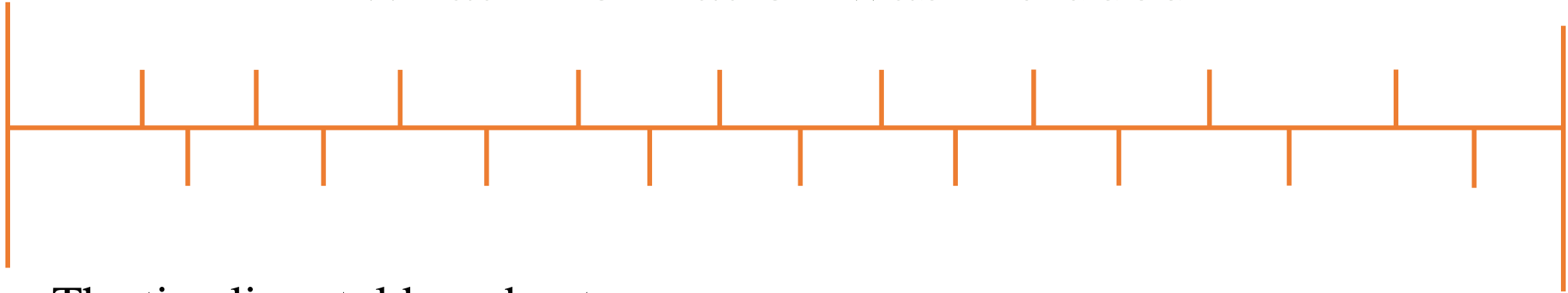


A minimalist approach



What information  
was included?

# What information was included?



The timelines told us about:

- Life stages and key transitions
- Locations
- Key relationships (family/partners/friends)
- Education and work
- Physical and mental health (e.g. COVID, HIV diagnosis, cancer, stroke)
- Wider context (e.g. decriminalisation)

**These were not research interviews so not as detailed as a full timeline**



What feedback did we get?



## What feedback did we get?

*“It did allow me to think through my life”*

*“It was good, I felt like it was almost freeing to reflect”*

*“How much I have gone through. Self-compassion and respect”*

*“Helpful, revealing and cathartic”*

*“Have been involved in research before, so this was familiar”*

*“It stirs up memories, makes you think about what happened to you”*

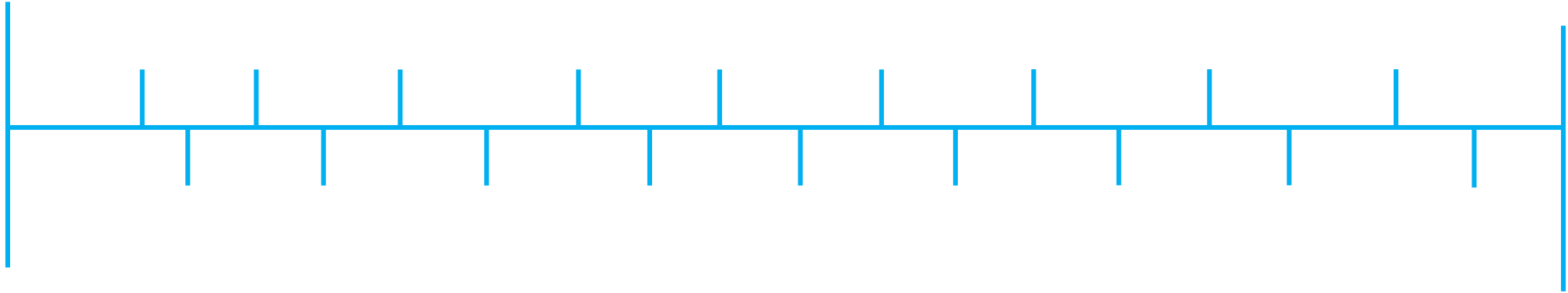
*“Some things stick that you would rather forget. It brings things back”*

*“I’ve found greater freedom in later life as family have died off and they are not around to be embarrassed”*



Advantages of this method

# Advantages of timeline interviewing



- Provides a framework for life-story interviews with older people
- Potential for ownership and co-production – timeline is drafted by participant with role of researcher to elicit, prompt, probe
- Timeline offers a focal point for the interview, potentially less challenging or exposing than 1-2hrs of eye contact
- Allows for individuality of expression, playfulness, creativity
- Produces an interesting artefact linked to an individual's biography



Areas for reflection

# Areas of reflection

Lots of information to include- can be time-consuming and draining for participants

Potential barriers for people with cognitive impairments

This is quite an intensive approach – effective debriefing and aftercare are key

Need to test out with other target groups for our study

A two-stage interview is likely to be necessary

Thank you for listening, please feel free to ask questions!