

---

# Lives in Motion: Auto-biographical negotiations of migration, identity and belonging among racially minoritised older adults in the UK



**SIAL**

Socially Inclusive Ageing across the Lifecourse

**Brunel**

University  
of London

**UK  
RI**

Economic  
and Social  
Research Council

*BSA auto/biography study  
group seminar*

*7<sup>th</sup> May 2026*



---

# Project aims

## What?

- To contribute to better ageing by generating new knowledge about ageing;

## How?

- By understanding the complexities of ageing from diverse perspectives that are often overlooked;
- By using life-course perspectives to build a fuller context for ageing and later life;
- By combining messages from large-scale datasets with lived experience

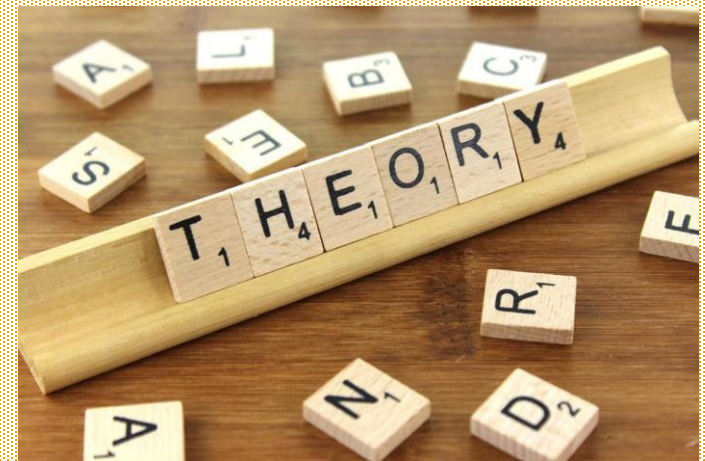
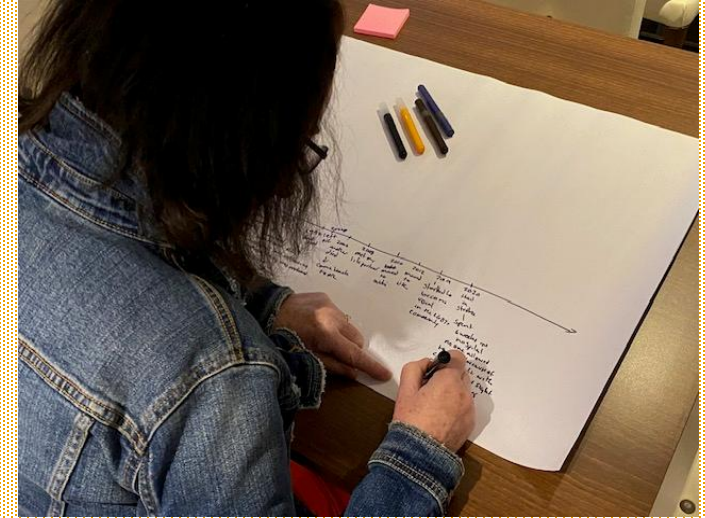
# Methods, sampling, theoretical frameworks

## Research methods & analysis

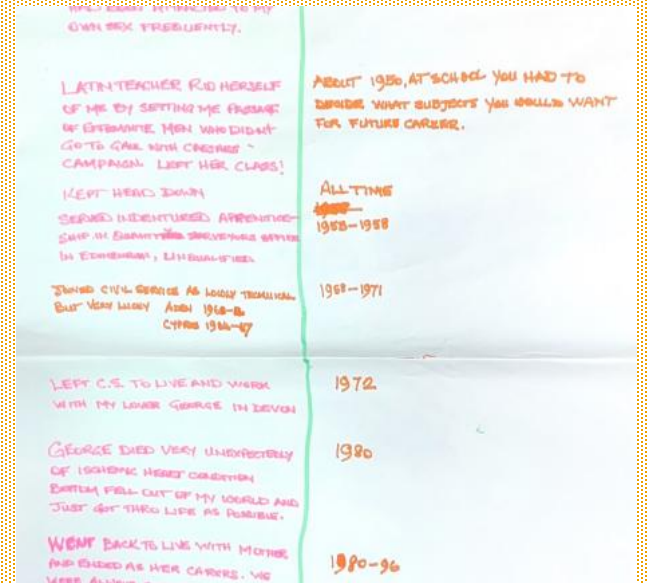
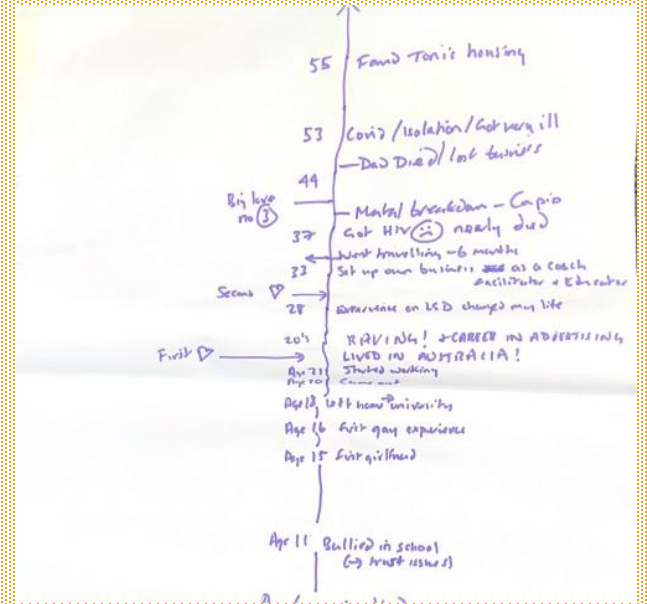
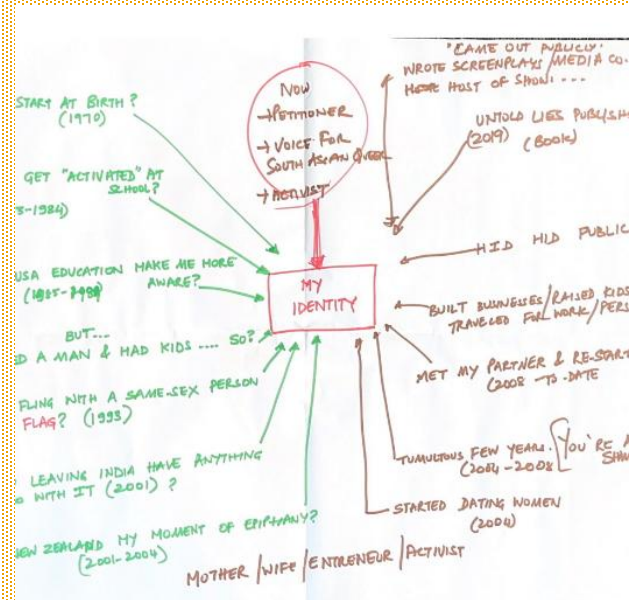
- Data collection: qualitative interviews drawing on Adriansen's (2012) timeline interview method;
- sample: 75 people aged 40+ who identify as one or more of: LGBTQ+, racially minoritised, living with a disability or chronic health condition;
- data analysis: Braun & Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (2019)

## Theoretical perspectives

- social health as lived social practices (Paul *et al*, 2023)
- strengths perspectives (Saleebey, 2009)
- intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989)
- minority stress (Meyer, 2003)
- stories whose time has come (Plummer, 2002)
- life-course as a policy lens (Marshall & McMullin, 2009)



# Timeline interviews

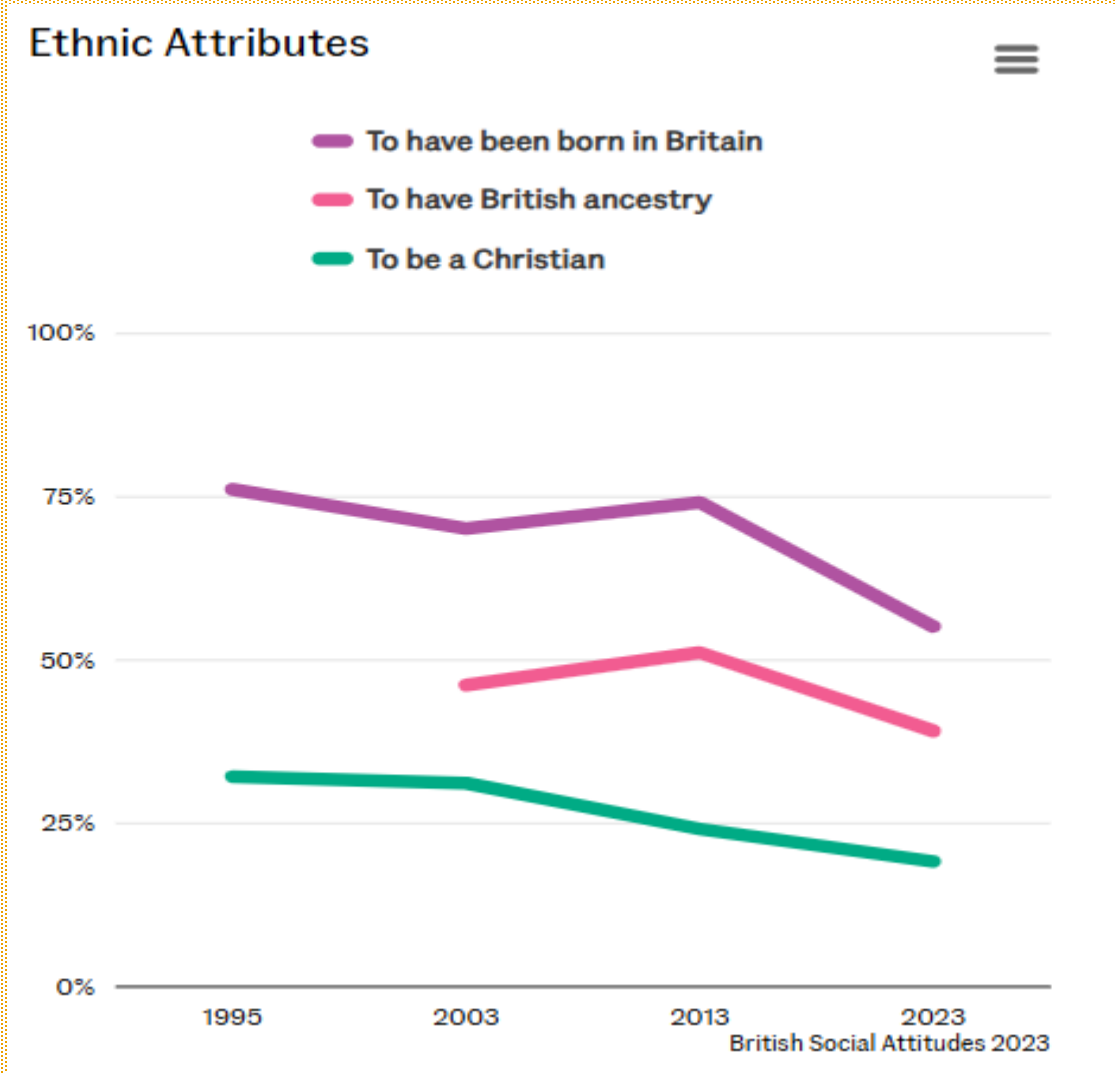


---

# Visibility in law, policy, society

- The current cohort of older minoritised groups have lived through significant social change and legislative reform;
- these ‘new’ ageing cohorts have to make sense of the evolution of the ways we understand ethnicity, disability, sexuality, gender identity and (in later life) ageing;
- historically the state has either ignored, neglected or marginalised these groups: there has been an acceleration of policy and legislative interest;
- but we have noticed the prominence of law, policy and social attitudes in their autobiographical accounts (interview data and timelines);
- policy and legislation construct as well as dismantle the social divisions that feed inequities: is the state a friend or foe to diverse communities of older people?

# Being 'truly British': social attitudes



Ideas about 'Britishness' seem to be becoming more inclusive

Yet in 2023 a majority (55% of respondents) still said it was important to have been born in Britain to be 'truly British'

# Media discourses on ethnicity

**BBC** Sign in Home News Sport Weather iPlayer

## NEWS

Home | InDepth | Israel-Gaza war | War in Ukraine | Climate | **UK** | World | Business | Politics | Culture

**UK** | England | N. Ireland | Scotland | Alba | Wales | Cymru | Isle of Man | Guernsey | Jersey | Local News

## Race report: 'UK not deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities'

© 31 March 2021

UK NEWS WEBSITE OF THE YEAR 2024

**The Telegraph** Your Say News Sport Business Money Opinion Ukraine Travel Health Lifestyle Culture

UK news Politics World Donald Trump Health news Defence Science Education Environment Inve

## How tinderbox Ballymena exploded into anti-migrant riots

Anti-Roma tensions have erupted with masked gangs roaming streets

UK NEWS WEBSITE OF THE YEAR 2024

**The Telegraph** Your Say News Sport Business Money Opinion Ukraine Travel Health Lifestyle Culture Puzzles

UK news Politics World Donald Trump Health news Defence Science Education Environment Investigations

## Police 'avoided grooming gang investigations over racism fears'

Ethnicity of suspects still goes uncovered in two-thirds of crimes, says Baroness Casey's report

Daily Mail + Follow 1.6M Followers

## Labour voters think biggest burden on NHS is migration... as 1,000 more arrive in just two days

Story by Neil Sears • 1d • 2 min read

# Selected legal & policy context

1948: Empire Windrush docks at Tilbury,

1958: racist attacks on Black community in Notting Hill

1962: Commonwealth Immigrants Act

1968: Powell's rivers of blood speech

1968: Race Relations Act

1971: deportations of Ugandan Asians

1971: Immigration Act

1976: Race Relations Act

1985: Broadwater Farm riots

1993: racist murder of Stephen Lawrence

1998: MacPherson inquiry

2010: Equality Act with race as a protected characteristic

2012: Hostile environment policies announced

2017: Grenfell Tower fire

2018: UK government apology over Windrush scandal & deportations

2020: Black Lives Matter protests follow the killing of George Floyd

2021: Sewell report

**1962**

- Ian Smith's white supremacist party, the Rhodesian Front, wins power in Rhodesia's election.
- The former British colony of Uganda becomes an independent republic, with Milton Obote as prime minister.
- A crisis erupts when the state-funded University of Mississippi (known as "Ole Miss") admits a Black man, James Meredith. When Meredith arrived at Ole Miss under the protection of federal forces including U.S. marshals, a mob of more than 2,000 people formed on the Oxford, Mississippi campus. Two people were killed and close to 200 injured in the ensuing chaos, which ended only after President Kennedy's administration sent some 5,000 troops to restore order.
- Commonwealth Immigrants Act is passed with the aim of reducing immigration from the former British empire. Six years later the controls are tightened further.
- Jamaica-born Wilton Samuel Jackson becomes Britain's first black train driver.

**1961**

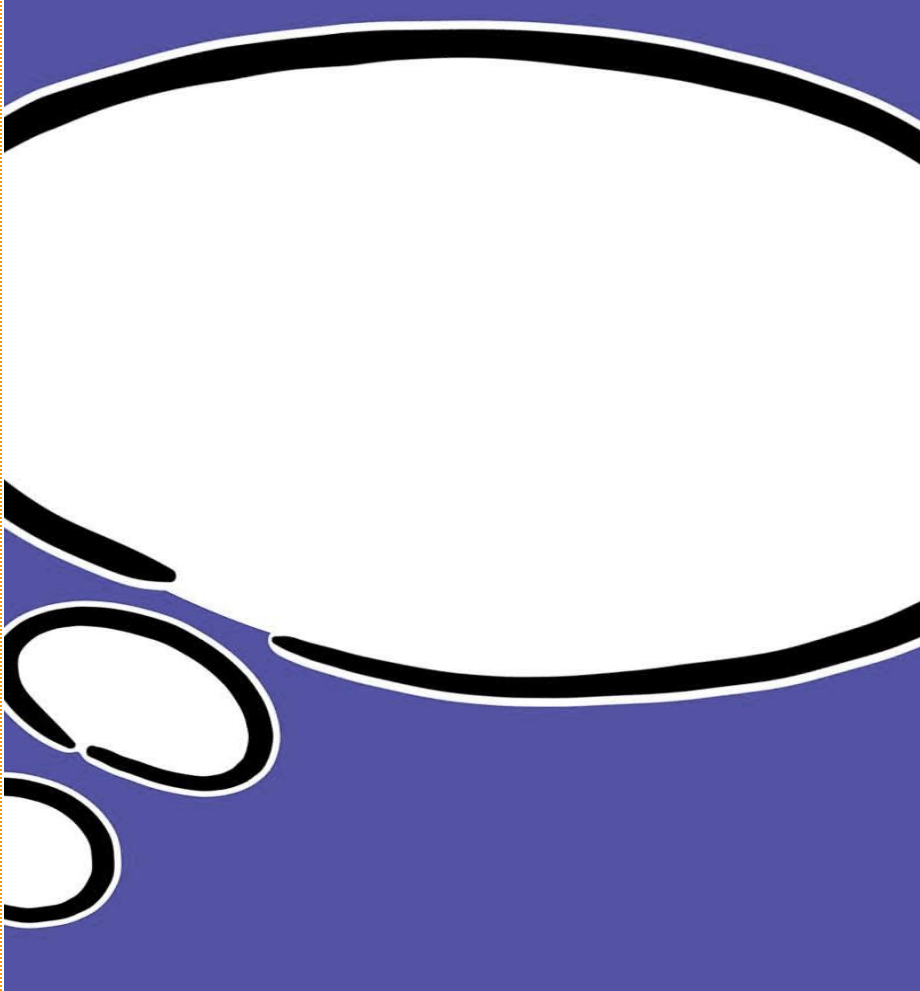
- Former British colony Sierra Leone becomes an independent state within the Commonwealth.
- Joshua Nkomo founds ZAPU, the Zimbabwe African People's Union, in the British colony of Southern Rhodesia.
- Patrice Lumumba, first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, is murdered. His death sparks outrage and demonstrations across the world.

**1963**

- Zanzibar becomes an independent nation and a member of the Commonwealth.
- Kenya becomes independent, with Jomo Kenyatta as prime minister.
- Governor George C. Wallace stands in a doorway of the University of Alabama to block two Black students from registering. The standoff continues until President John F. Kennedy sends the National Guard to the campus.
- On 28th August, 250,000 people (both Black and white) participated in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the largest demonstration in the history of the nation's capital and the most significant display of the civil rights movement's growing strength.
- Martin Luther King Jr speaks of the struggle facing Black Americans and the need for continued action and nonviolent resistance. "I have a dream," King intoned, expressing his faith that one day white and Black people would stand together as equals, and there would be harmony between the races: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character."
- White supremacists bomb the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama during Sunday services; four young African American girls were killed in the explosion. The church bombing was the third in 3 days after the federal government had ordered the integration of Alabama's school systems. The perpetrators were Klan members Robert Chambliss, convicted in 1977, Thomas Edwin Barton Jr. and Bobby Frank Cherry, convicted in 2001 and 2002. The fourth suspect, Herman Cash, died before he was indicted.
- Assassination of NAACP organizer Medgar Evers in Mississippi.
- Guy Bailey (originally from Jamaica) is refused a job as a bus driver for the Bristol Omnibus Company, despite having the appropriate qualifications. When Bailey arrived, he was refused an interview and recalled how the receptionist stood and went to the manager's office, heard her call through his door: "Your two o'clock appointment is here, and he's black", and how the manager informed him; "We don't employ black people." Paul Stephenson, who taught Guy Bailey in his evening school, suspected the rejection based on skin colour and purposefully sent him to the interview to test this theory. Stephenson invited the press and encouraged a bus boycott. The boycott quickly gained popularity and politicians including Bristol Southeast MP Tony Benn declared that he would "stay off the buses, even if [he had] to find a bike". Labour leader Harold Wilson said that he was "glad that so many Britons [were] supporting the [boycott] campaign... we wish them every success". On August 27th, 500 bus workers in Bristol had voted in favour of "the employment of suitable coloured workers as bus crews" - the bus boycott had succeeded.

---

# What study participants discussed



- life stages;
- places they live/lived in;
- key relationships;
- education and work;
- physical and mental health;
- experience of getting older
- wider social context;

---

# Belonging

The very low expectations that we had. Because I was always told by my parents that, you know, “This – you’re visitors in this country, you can’t expect to be... equal...Keep a lower profile, get on with it.” So, I think I had fairly low expectations.

South Asian male, aged 65



---

# Neighbourhood

Like I said, one of the experience, erm, up to now, [ROAD REMOVED] in [LOCATION REMOVED] was the most amazing road. We were the only, there was us and another Sikh family, and we were like royalty on that road.

Erm, the community was just amazing there. We loved our neighbours, they loved us. We did street parties. Our first, erm, Queen's Jubilee party was in [1977]

And if you remember, erm, we had skinheads: P- bashing. So, erm, we were told one, erm, Friday, by our neighbours, "Stay indoors tomorrow and, erm, don't come out and we're all going out like vigilantes to protect the cars."

South Asian woman, aged 72

---

---

# Re-evaluating racism & 'knowing your place'

Because it was something that was very different for them, something that was alien to them and so they didn't know, and they had to work long hours so as to provide for us. Um, so they never questioned in the same way that we would question.

So they accepted more that the, your doctors were right, your teachers were right. Anybody in authority were correct. So I don't think that there were much questioning.

And we, for myself, I didn't understand that there was racism at that time. Or that I was a victim of racism. It's not until you get older that you would look back and you think that wasn't right. You know, I wasn't given those chances as equally as everybody else.

So you don't know until you're made aware and knowledge is key.

Black Caribbean female, aged 62



---

# Immigration laws

Immigration, immigration, immigration. Now, this issue has been there every election. Every election, from the day I came because I came within that immigration situation.

The first legislation, and if you read any part of between 1950 and 1962 when the first, Immigration Act was passed, all that debate is, is, is, is really open, overt discrimination, hatred, um, immigrants are being blamed for everything, you know. They brought this with them, they brought this with them. The whole poverty in this country, which existed for centuries, you know, was the fault of the immigrants.

South Asian male, aged 87



---

# New migration patterns & impact

One, one brother went off to Canada, (.) left, and that was quite heartbreaking for mum and one brother is, erm, in [LOCATION REMOVED].

And he's still living there with his family. So that's how the family started disintegrating more.

Erm, I don't mean disintegrating, we're still in touch but we were not one unit anymore.

...

Children have to be teachers, engineers, doctors.

South Asian woman, aged 72

---

---

# Intersectional ageing: being a target

I walk with a stick, but I, instead of a stick I use an umbrella. So that it makes me, it gives me that bit more reassurance that I'm not a target. But you know, I don't look disabled, so I use an umbrella, but it is a walking stick.

Black Caribbean female, aged 62



---

# Ageing well

Ageing well means being comfortable, erm, having to be able to cope with your day to day functions. you know, when you have to depend on people, bedpots, toilets, you name it - it becomes difficult.

I don't feel old, you know. Erm, not old, I don't feel I need help or anything.

South Asian woman, aged 79

---

---

# Lives in motion

These autobiographical accounts tell us about lives in motion:

- push and pull factors reflect global events and trends: partition of India, post-war decolonisation & Commonwealth, deportations of Asian people from East Africa, global economic developments & globalisation;
- local factors also important: e.g. South Asian communities in West London, Black Caribbean communities in Bristol;

Sociological imagination (C Wright Mills) a relevant lens: biographies and history intertwined, also public issues and personal troubles;

Intersectionalities (Crenshaw) also visible in autobiographical accounts; ageing a new part of the mix.

---

# Conclusion

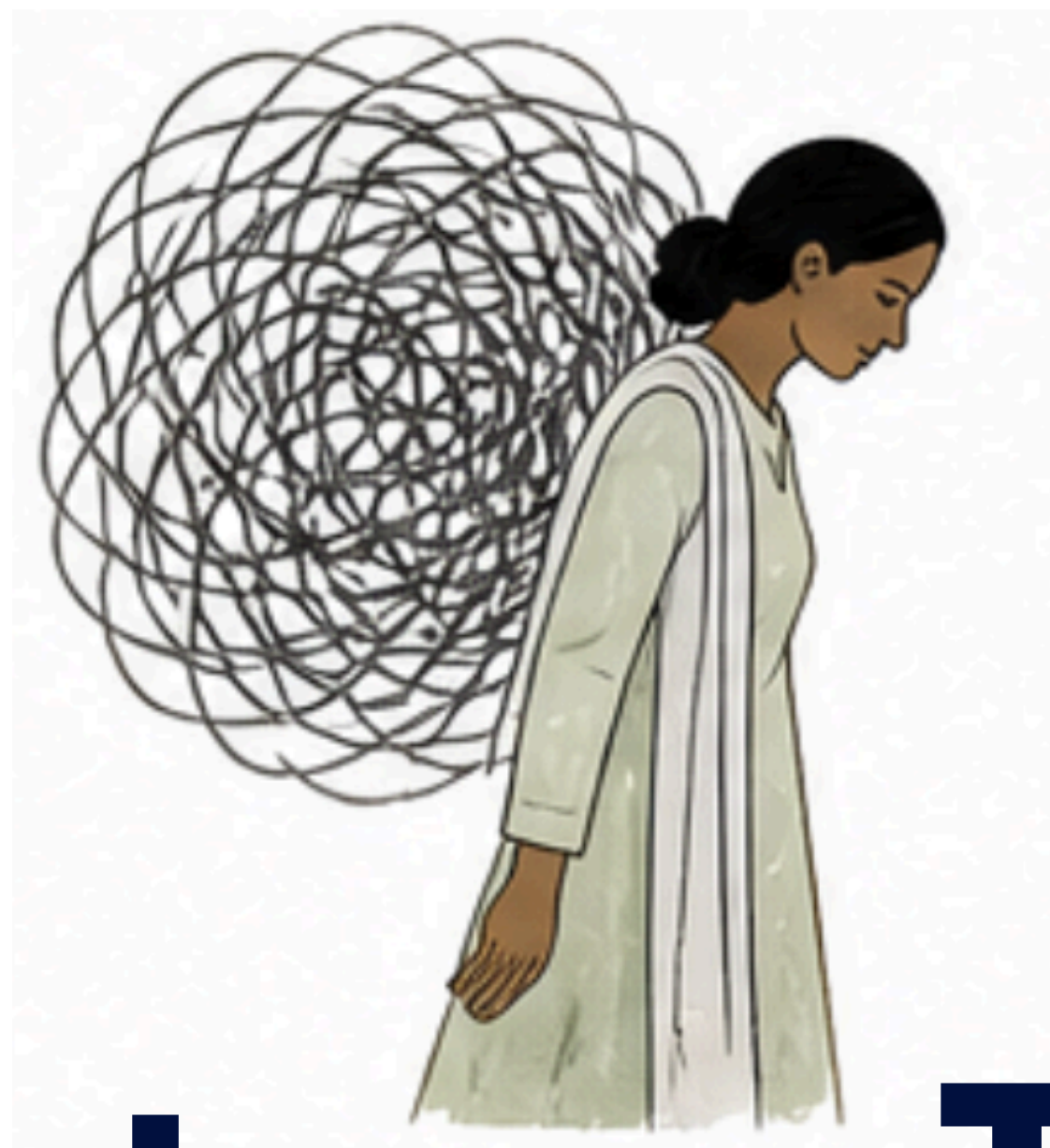
Our data suggest that negotiating identity is a constant process for racially minoritised elders;

- media and policy discourse on migration undermine notions of belonging;
- ageing brings elders into new contexts where they may experience combinations of racism, ageism, ablism and other belief systems that exclude;
- Participants continue to experience new forms of exclusion as they age: when they move home; access social care; access community services.

---

# Find out more about the Socially Inclusive Ageing Across the Life-course study





# Between Tradition and Belonging:

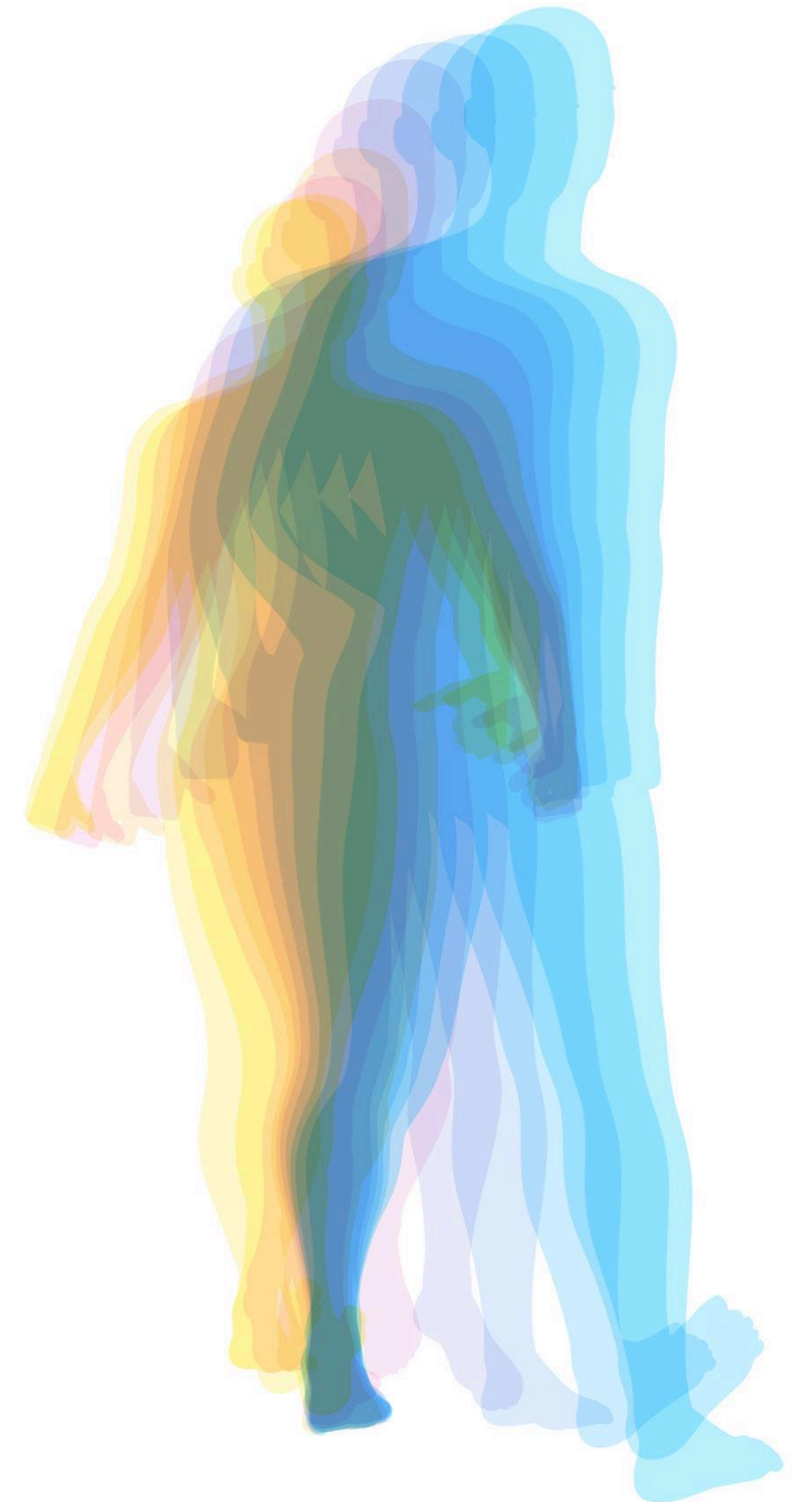
GENDER, DISABILITY AND CULTURAL NEGOTIATION AMONG SOUTH  
ASIAN OLDER ADULTS IN BRITAIN

**Presented by Dr Amy Prescott**

# Framing:

LIVES IN MOTION

- Lives shaped across time and place
- Migration as ongoing
- Identity and belonging are not fixed
- Shaped through everyday experiences



# What this is about?

Ageing reflects earlier life experiences. With a focus on:

- Culture
- Gender
- Disability
- Experiences are interconnected

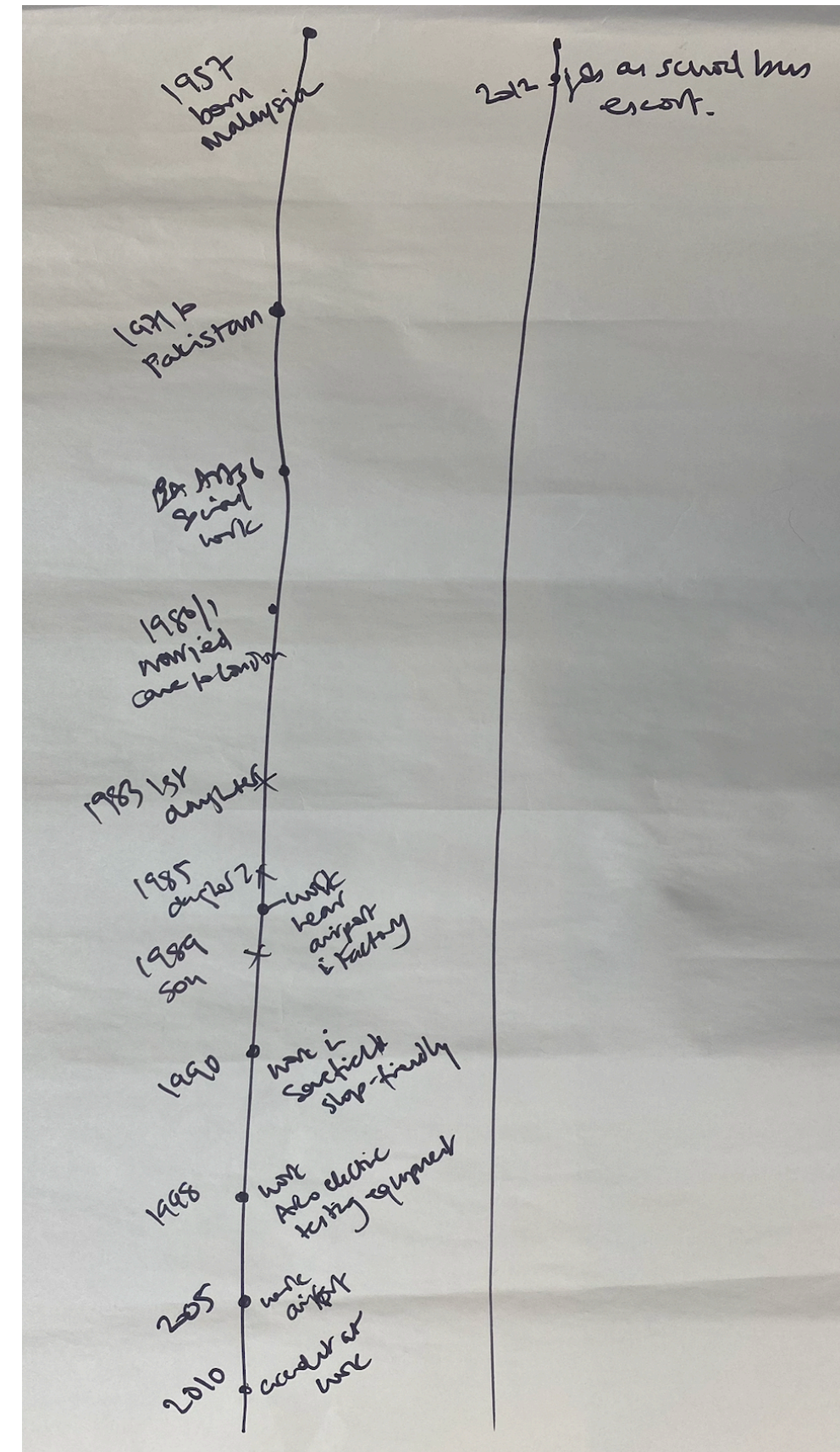
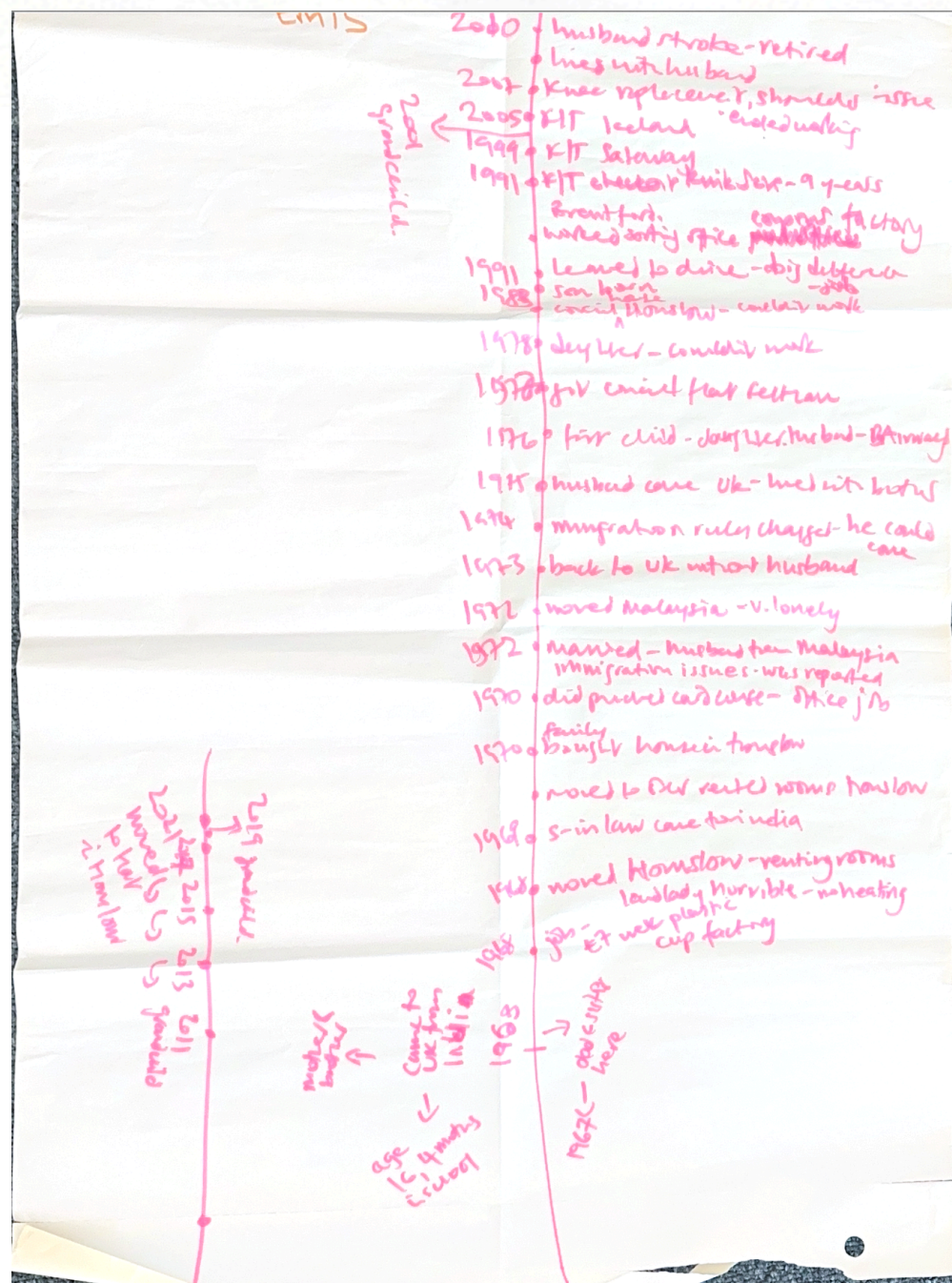
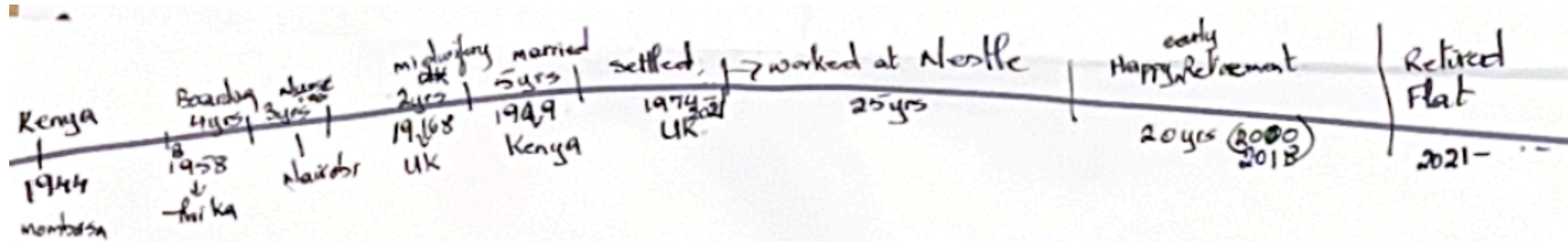
# The study:

## SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE AGEING ACROSS THE LIFE-COURSE

- UK-wide qualitative study (Scotland, Wales, SE England, London, Midlands, Manchester, and Birmingham)
- Mixed methods project
- Qualitative strand: Timeline interviews (n=75) across three key population groups
- Thematic analysis

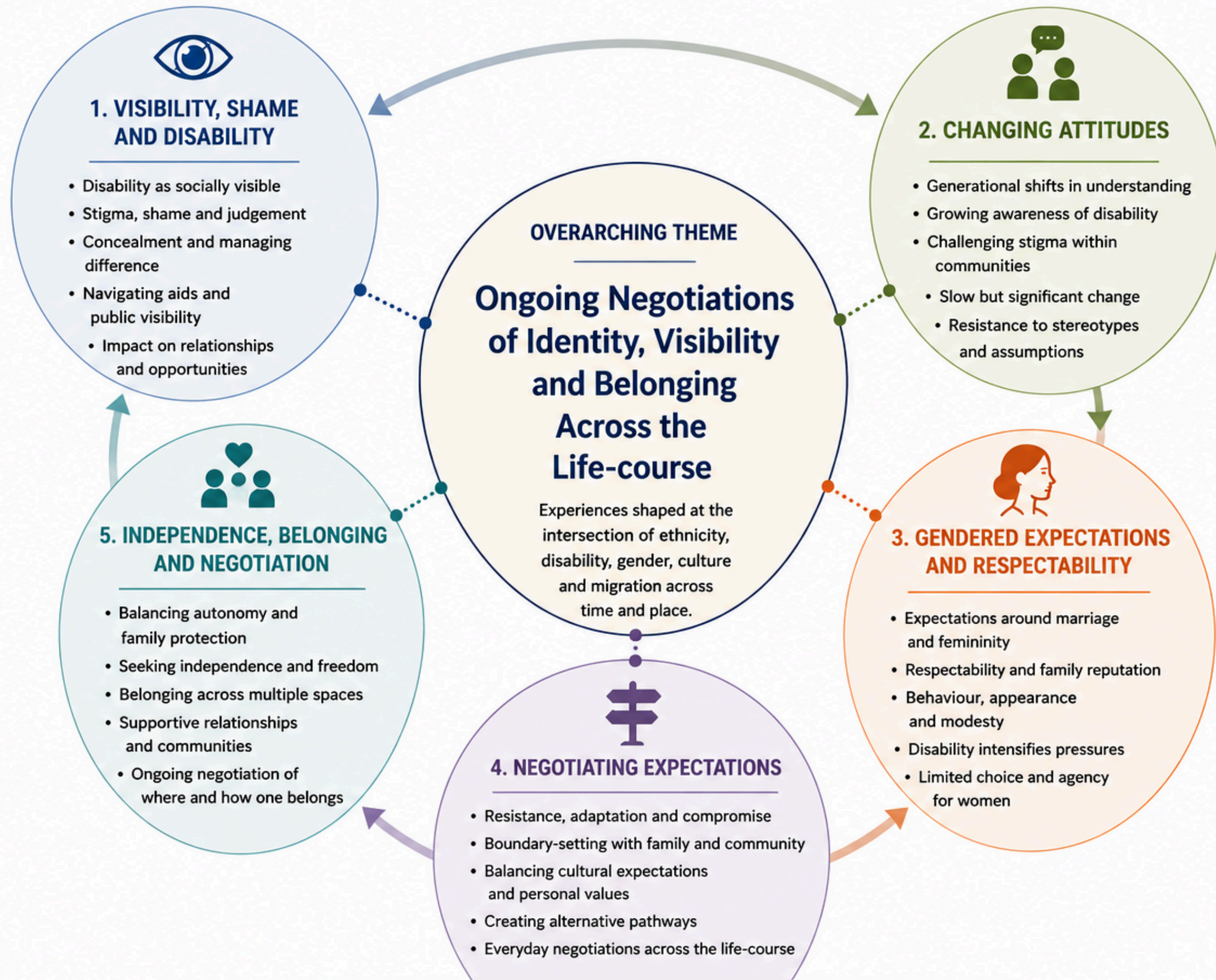
Focus today: Older South Asian adults


# Timeline examples



# Understanding culture, disability and belonging

- Culture shapes identity, values and belonging [1]
- Disability is socially and culturally understood [2, 3]
- Intersectionality [4] highlights overlapping experiences of:
  - gender
  - ethnicity
  - disability
  - religion [5–8]
- Stigma and expectations shape everyday life [9]
- Importance of lived experience and voice [10, 5]



 **THEMES ARE INTERCONNECTED AND OVERLAP**  
Shaping experiences across time, place and relationships.

# Visibility, Shame and Disability



*In the early days I never used to go around, you know, going to the temple or going into social weddings and things with my white cane...people just see you, stare at you...even if it's like for...group photos. "Oh do you wanna put your white cane away?"...it's always there and it'll always be because people are not just comfortable with disability as such.*

**DIS009**

*Because of the background I'm from and who I am it's a shame thing...they wanted to brush it under the carpet...because I'm partially sighted, no one's gonna know unless I tell you, I can mask it, you know, it's not like I'm totally blind and people are gonna see it, I can make a hundred and one excuses, and I think the family were comfortable...my grandparents...didn't know I was visually impaired; I had to just say that I was a bit clumsy...I had to use anything just to hide it...we don't look at disability as being a positive, where my siblings today don't talk about it 'cos it's just been not a subject to talk about.*

**DIS008**

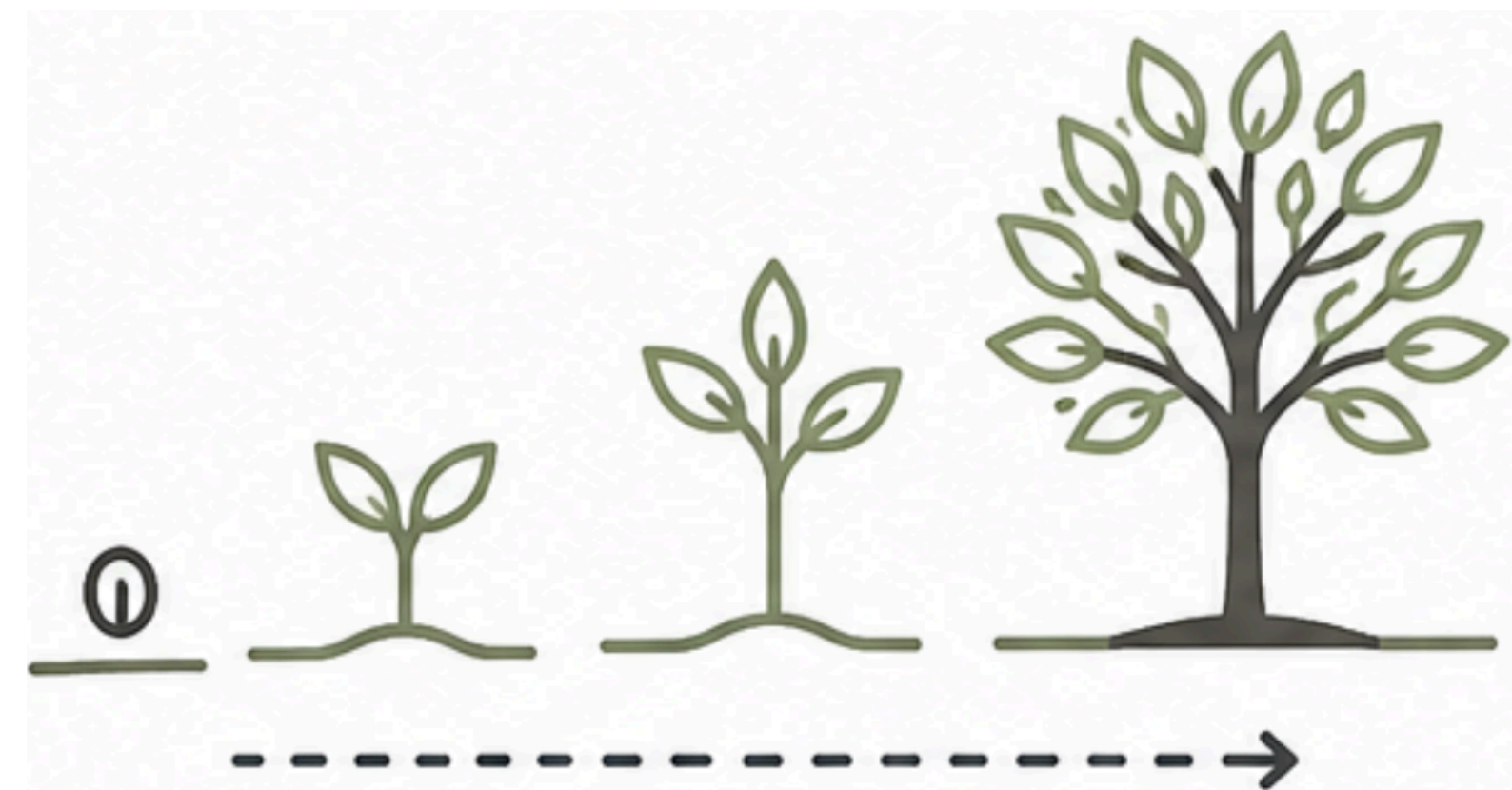
# (Slow) Changing attitudes

*[In] India...there was discrimination...people want to show that they're sympathetic towards a blind person, a disabled person, when in fact they want to satisfy their ego...if a...blind person or a disabled person, reaches to their level they can't tolerate it, they say, "How a blind person could be at this level?" ... There are certain prejudices and misconceptions associated with blindness and other disabilities...Things are changing; I am talking about fifteen years ago...the facilities are increasing...as for the educated blind population, the percentage of employment amongst the blind is much more in India than it is here.*

**DIS008**

*All of my life, I suppose, I have never been given a platform or a space to talk about my visual impairment 'cos it... like I said...it's negative, it's shame,...I was always...given this impression by external...community...it's something you did bad or wrong in a past life so it's a punishment.*

**DIS011**



# Gendered expectations and respectability

*My mum's got really bad severe depression because of all of this, because of the culture and the disability...it just catches up. 'Cos don't forget, she's lived her whole life in shame, hiding...I said to somebody..."It's like you've done something wrong but you don't know what you've done wrong. It's like you're a thief in your own body."...where my mother's been really sick...somebody said..."Who would have believed it that her mother's sick and it's her disabled child that's looking after her",... Like the one child that we said was no good is actually better than the others."*

**DIS008**

*When I got married my husband came but he came a year after he was expected because, again, discrimination. Umm, Immigration, when he applied for his visa, they didn't believe that it was a genuine marriage..."Why would he want to marry someone from England?" because he wasn't. So I was a postgraduate student from England and, and he...didn't have any real education...he was a farmer and sighted..."You're sighted, why would you want to marry a blind...? Not genuine."...We had to have a court case in the end. I had to attend court here to prove that it was a genuine marriage...so he came a year later than expected...moved into our flat, which I think was a massive shock to him as well...because of ...the stereotype, I suppose, what he was brought up with in India that blind people just... they're not capable of doing anything.*

**DIS011**



# Negotiating Expectations

*The other thing when we experienced the racism from neighbours, that really kind of hit home to me and I guess the disability...factor came into it with my vision impairment...I remember one particular comment that they'd made and said, "Oh, we just felt sorry for you because you had a disabled child." ... For me, it was a bit like, wait, do people pity my parents? ... It was something that never...had I even given it a thought and it...made me more sad for my parents than it did for me...it was a bit of an eye-opener to me...is this what people think, like, of my parents, that they just pity them because they have a child that happens to have a disability? I did a lot of growing...I felt like I grew up a lot in a very short space of time or...lost some of the world is a good place.*

*When she was getting married to me...somebody with a disability, of course, there was all this resistance from her family and, you know, thinking that "You can't be spending your life with somebody who's just got a part-time job and is almost blind and...", which any brother or father would be worried but...she's very level-headed and here we are thirty years later, we are still married and life is good and we've got the most ultimate respect from all the families.*

**DIS009**



# Independence and Belonging

*My life was kind of defined by my sight loss and that's what I'm kind of discovering now, you know, that's the kind of motto, is "You're a person. You're a person with sight loss." ... But then I suppose internally...without knowing it, that's what I suppose I've been doing from a young age...there's been that, you know, spirit. Like I know my spirit is very, very strong and, and determined,..I think that's something in my nature.*

**DIS011**

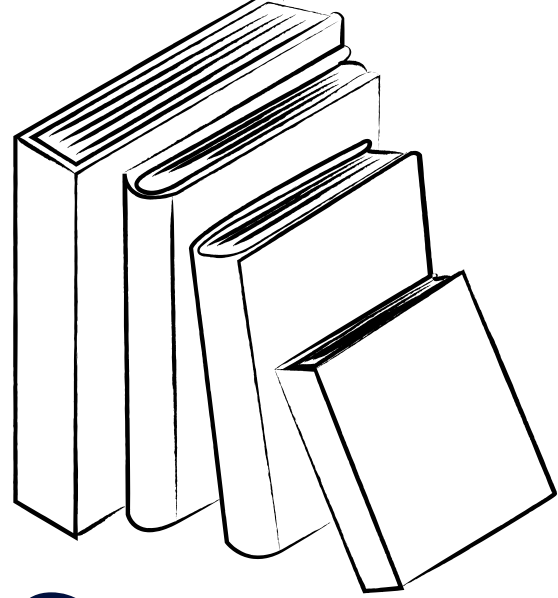


*My husband all the time. He goes, "...cos you're young, you are the driver and she's the old woman." And how many Asian women in their 70s drive a car? "... I don't know any...Like when I say [to in-laws]... Yeah, my mum speaks English." They go, "What?" I said, "Yeah, I can send a letter to my mum and she will get the gist of it and she just turns me into her PA and I write," and...I know what they're thinking, they're thinking, "But you can't see." I said, "No, I can write. Obviously I'm not writing in the traditional way." And I'm like, "Well ask me the question and I'll tell you how I write." My mum sits there and goes, "Wow." She said, "You told me this, I never thought..." And I said, "Mum, you've got strengths, I've got strengths, together we're gonna get to that hospital appointment." She said, "Yes." I said, "Yes, so now you're happy that you're learned English." I said, "How do you feel, the only Asian woman to drive, speak and...?" and she goes, she goes, "I can't believe I'm in trousers." I said, "Nor can I...I took a bullet for that."*

**DIS008**

# Concluding thoughts

- Experiences of ageing are shaped across the life-course through the intersection of culture, gender, disability, migration, and family expectations.
- Participants' narratives highlighted ongoing negotiations of visibility, independence, belonging, and respectability within both community and wider societal contexts.
- Disability was not experienced in isolation, but through culturally situated understandings of shame, responsibility, care, and identity.
- While participants described experiences of stigma and exclusion, they also demonstrated resistance, agency, adaptation, and strong forms of interdependence.
- These findings highlight the importance of listening to lived experiences in order to better understand how ageing, disability, and belonging are negotiated in everyday life.



# References

1. Moran, R. T., Abramson, N. R., & Moran, S. V. (2014). *Managing Cultural Differences* (9th ed.). Routledge.
2. Ingstad, B., & Whyte, S. R. (Eds.). (1995). *Disability and Culture*. University of California Press.
3. Bickenbach, J. (2009). Disability, culture and the UN convention. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 31(14), 1111-1124.
4. Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
5. Morris, J. (1996). *Encounters with Strangers: Feminism and Disability*. Women's Press.
6. Garland-Thomson, R. (2005). Feminist disability studies. *Signs*, 30(2), 1557-1587.
7. Begum, N. (1992). Disabled women and the feminist agenda. *Feminist Review*, 40, 70-84.
8. Miles, M. (1996). Engaging with the disability rights movement: The experience of community-based rehabilitation in South Asia. *Disability & Society*, 11(4), 501-517.
9. Groce, N. E. (1999). Disability in cross-cultural perspective: Rethinking disability. *The Lancet*, 354(9180), 756-757.
10. Morris, J. (1991). *Pride Against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability*. Women's Press.



UNIVERSITY OF  
SURREY



Economic  
and Social  
Research Council



Socially Inclusive Ageing across the Lifecourse

# Thank you for listening

I LOOK FORWARD TO TAKING ANY QUESTIONS