

Human rights – although the Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination because of their age, older people’s rights are not as widely acknowledged or developed in comparison to other groups. The negative experience of older age is a pressing social justice issue. Ageism and a culture of paternalism shape the roles that older people can have in society but also who is allowed to make decisions on their behalf. Society’s expectations can also be internalised by older people e.g. the need to withdraw and become invisible.

Fluidity – age, and age identity, is felt in many different ways, it is a fluid and multidimensional concept. We cannot assume that one person’s experience of age and ageing will be the same as another’s.

Diversity – older people are not one homogenous group despite what the stereotypes assume, older people come from very different (socio-economic) backgrounds and experiences, represent a range of ethnicities, cultures, and sexualities, and have very different interests, motivations and expectations.

Desires, hopes, ambitions – meaning and purpose does not fade away with our younger selves, we continue to have desires, hopes and ambitions as we get older; we have a stake in the present and the future.

Living in the moment – Many older people talk about the increased possibility of living in the moment as their lives become free of former obligations (e.g. employment, children and families), the opportunity to focus on only doing the things you really want to do. For some older people, living in the moment means doing what you need to do to survive.

Loss – older people experience deep, profound loss – of key people, life partners, family, friends, purpose, and identity. Becoming aware of one’s own mortality is probably one of the most painful aspects of growing old.