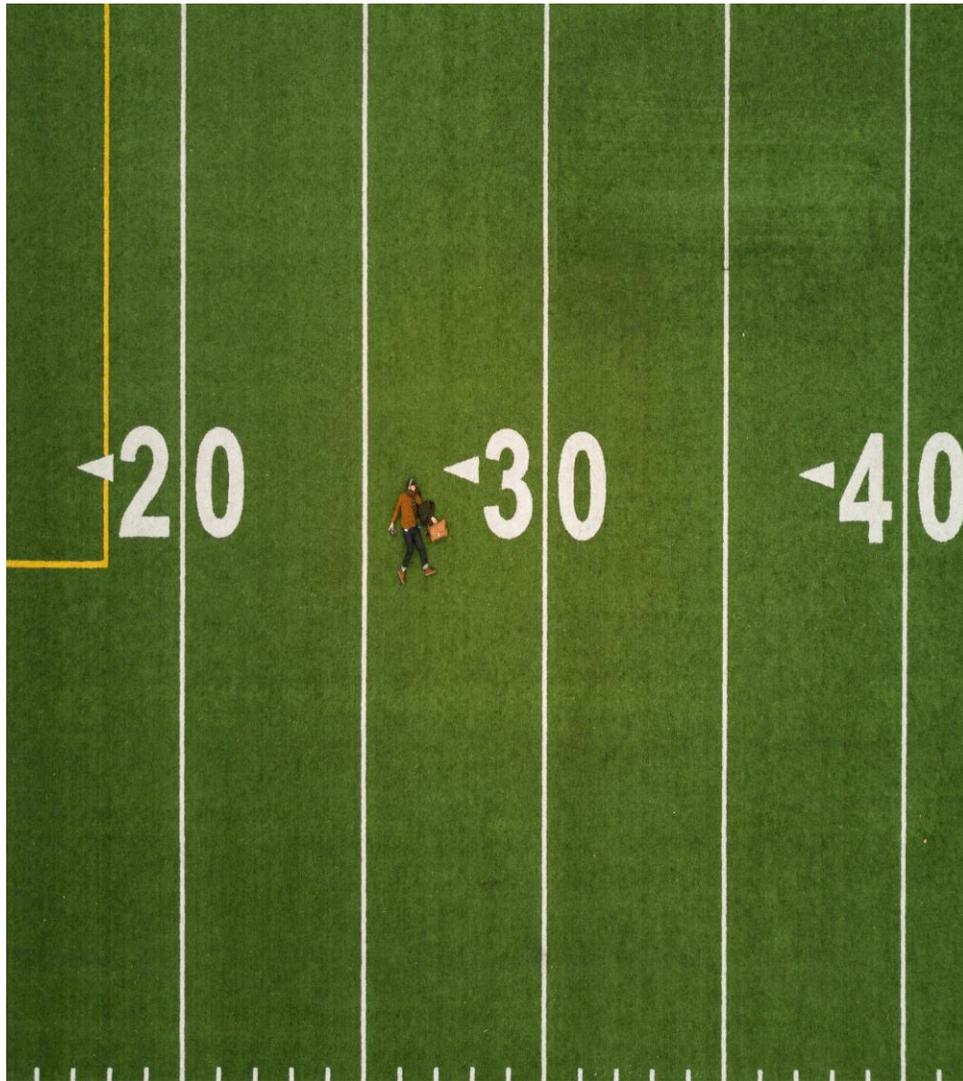


Dignity has no use by Date: the ongoing challenge of ageism in Scottish society

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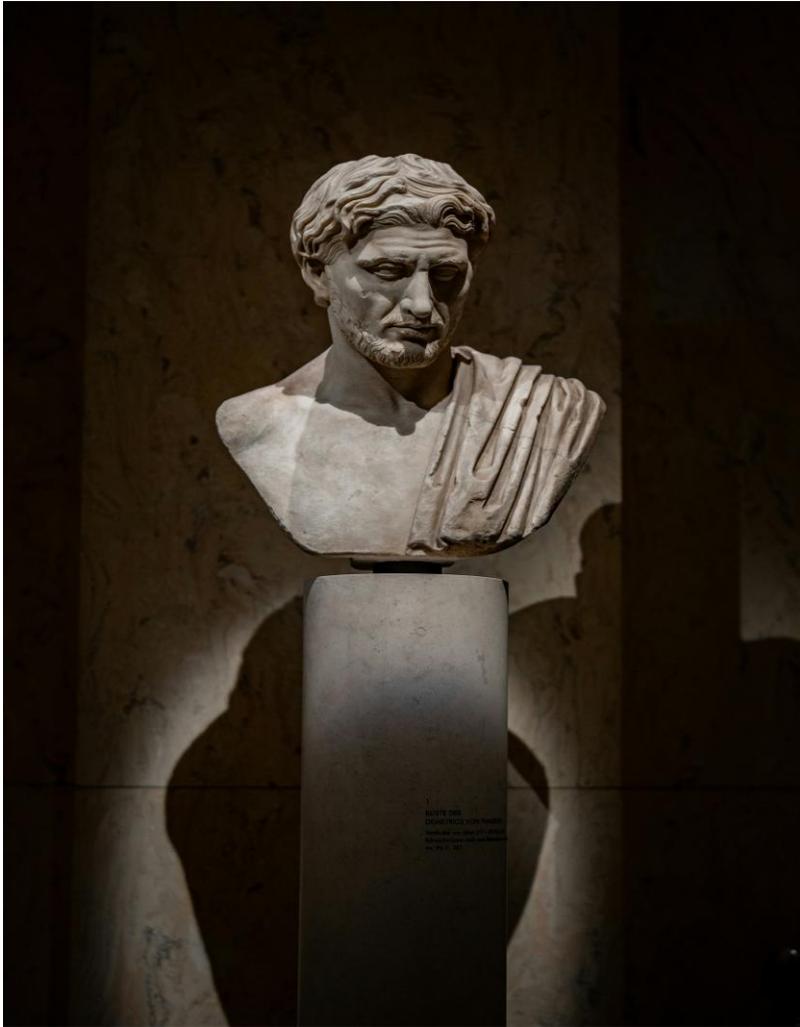
Ageism

‘the systematic stereotyping and discrimination against individuals based on their age, particularly targeting older adults.’

Dr. Robert N. Butler (1969)

Ageism is not merely a social bias; it reflects deeper philosophical notions about value, productivity, and worth.

Historically, Western societies have often equated worth with economic productivity, sidelining those who are retired or less active in the workforce



Aristotle - we see the stereotype of the elderly as overly cautious, suspicious, and cynical.

“They are cynical; that is, they always tend to put the worst construction upon everything.”



- Ancient Sparta (c. 5th century BCE) – no military service
- Medieval allegory the Dance of Death / Danse Macabre - older figures depicted as frail and near death.
- Shakespeare- King Lear (1606) - the King descend into madness

“Age is unnecessary.”

King Lear.



The Industrial Revolution (18th–19th century) older workers were pushed out of the workforce in favour of younger, faster, more “productive” labourers.

19th Century Poor Laws - workhouses.

Dickens - characters like Miss Havisham
(*Great Expectations*)

- The **Crone / Hag** (e.g. fairy tales, Macbeth's witches): aging woman as witchlike, manipulative, or grotesque
- The **Foolish or Bitter Elder** (e.g. Lear, Miss Havisham)
- **The Discarded Elder** (e.g. King Lear's banishment)
- **Idealisation of Youth** (common in romantic and modernist visual art)
- **Aging as Decline vs. Aging as Wisdom:** The former dominates in mainstream narratives; the latter appears in select moral or spiritual texts.

Scotland's demography.

We are an ageing population with a declining birth rate.

- Mid-2023, over one million people in Scotland are aged 65 and over, accounting for approximately **20.3% of the total population**.
- By mid-2047, the number of individuals aged 75 and over is expected to rise by around 341,300.
- The dependency ratio - the proportion of individuals not in the workforce (under 16 and over pensionable age) compared to those of working age- is projected to increase from 60 per 100 in 2014 to 68 per 100 by 2033.

Scotland's ageism

- ***Growing incidents of hate***, - recorded hate crimes in Scotland rose by 63% in 2024-5.

Approximately 300 of these were age-related.

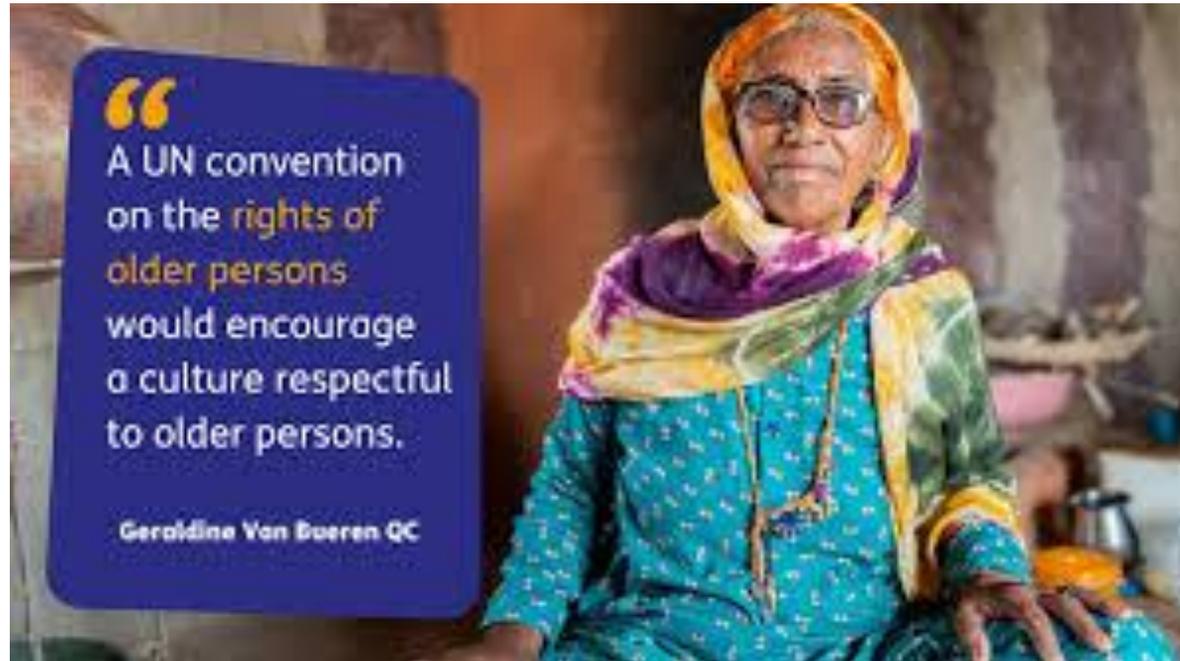
- Only **7% of respondents** felt older people are **represented positively in the media**. (Age Scotland)

- **More than a third of respondents (36%)** felt they were made to feel a burden to society.

Additionally, 34% said that life was getting worse for older people in Scotland. One in five (21%) felt valued by society. (Age Scotland)

- Surveys suggest that many people either believe they have been or fear discrimination in seeking work if they are over the age of 55.

- **Commissioner for Older People in Scotland.**
- **Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.**



- 1. Redesigning communities through the lens of age inclusion.**
- 2. Education and Awareness.**
- 3. Policy Reform.**
- 4. Reimagining work and contribution.**
- 5. Community Engagement.**
- 6. Media Representation.**
- 7. Tackling digital exclusion as a rights issue.**

Dignity, has no use-by date.

It does not expire when we retire.

It does not fade with memory.

It is not conditional on mobility, nor appearance, nor the capacity to contribute to GDP.

It is rooted in being human — and that is enough.

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