What is Old Age?
Chart 9.2: The rectangularisation of the life curve in England and Wales

Source: Government Actuary’s Department.
Old age as vulnerability
Equally true?
Structured dependency of old age

- creation of old age through retirement
- centrality of pension and poverty
- older people portrayed as economic burden
- exclusion of older people from society
- ageism
- Institutionalisation
- Old age as vulnerability
The Ageing of the Baby Boom Generation

- Demographic changes – life expectancy increasing
- Health in later life - increase in disability free life expectancy
- Cultural changes – emergence of the ‘Third Age’
- Generational changes – role of consumption and identity
- Policy changes – retirement rather than old age
Cultural changes – emergence of the ‘Third Age’

• Peter Laslett’s *A Fresh Map of Life*
• Compression of morbidity
• Long 3rd age - 50+
• Short 4th age of illness and incapacity
• Freedom from pressure of family and work
• Not disengagement or structured dependency
• University of the Third Age
Generational field

- Generational dispositions of ‘baby-boomer’ cohort continues over time and into retirement
- Generational field of the Third Age is determined by consumption
- Generational habitus validates choice and freedom rather than ascription
- Significance of lifestyle and consumption
Cultures of the third age

- Self
  - diversity of post-working lifestyles
  - expansion of time and opportunities for leisure
  - ageing of youth culture
  - consumer society and identity

- Citizen
  - institutionalisation / de-institutionalisation of the life-course
  - re-negotiation of citizenship and retirement
  - Third age rhetorics / fourth age realities

- Body
  - youth culture and the somatic society
  - age appropriate images and activities
  - the ethics and aesthetics of ageing
The nature of the fourth age

• Emergence of reconstituted idea of frailty corresponds with re-ordering of ‘old age’
• Delineation of terms separates old age into ‘successful’ third age divorced from ideas of failure and from the historical connection with disability and illness
• It also separates later life from the ‘deathly consequences’ of frailty which forms the basis of the fourth age
Frailty and the fourth age

- Exposes the breakdown of the older person’s agency and identity
- Shift of narrative from self to others
- Represents the social imaginary of the feared features of ‘real’ old age - the fourth age
- Represents the marginalisation of the other rather than creates a universal bond
Conclusions

- Need to be aware of the changing nature of later life when examining vulnerability and old age
- Older people are diverse in terms of income and other social determinants including consumption
- Generational expectations and behaviours need to be taken into consideration
- Role of agency and choice in framing acceptable policy options