The Curious Personality Changes of Older Age

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You’ve probably heard the saying “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” An awful phrase, I know, but it speaks to a common belief about older adulthood: that it’s a time of stagnation. A time when we’ve become so set in our ways that, whether we’re proud of them or not, we’re not likely to budge.

Psychologists used to follow the same line of thinking: After young adulthood, people tend to settle into themselves, and personality, though not immutable, usually becomes stabler as people age. And that’s true—until a certain point. More recent studies suggest that something unexpected happens to many people as they reach and pass their 60s: Their personality starts changing again.

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