

Age entitlement or psychological transformation?

When older customers cross the threshold of Mount Vernon's Beatnik Barber Shop, owner Peter Babones notices that by and large they aren't shy about expressing their opinions.

In fact, the 39-year-old Catholic barber says he's often stunned by the lack of filter between the brain and mouth of some of these older men, who on the surface appear to be gentle souls.

"They just aren't afraid to say what's on their mind," he said. "It's like, with age comes the privilege of not having to worry about what comes out of your mouth."

Older people who become more direct as they age are often labeled as mature folks with colorful personalities, which makes one wonder if it's a natural part of the aging process, said Dr. Herbert Friedman, associate chairman of the department of medicine at Good Samaritan Hospital, Baltimore.

Since there doesn't appear to be any medical evidence to suggest there is a physiological reason for the "colorful personality" of many older men and women – barring Alzheimer's or certain forms of dementia – Dr. Friedman believes it's more of a psychological and emotional shift.

"The theory is that based on longevity, you get to say what is on your mind," he said. "You tend to lose your inhibitions as you age."

There tends to be a sense of entitlement among the elderly to express their feelings, Dr. Friedman said, "because at this age they have earned the right to say anything they want."

Family members often apologize to the doctor for the directness of their elderly kin, but he finds the frankness of senior citizens refreshing and healthy.

"It's less stressful to get what is burdening us off of our chest. As we know, stress

can contribute to all kinds of health problems,” Dr. Friedman said.