

Division 20- Adult Development and Aging

Looking ahead to a year of adaptation, growth, innovation, and belonging.

October 2026

<https://www.apadivisions.org/division-20>

President's Column

By Katherine Ramos, Ph.D.



To serve as this year's Division 20 President is already a major highlight of my career. When I take stock of the rich history of past Division members, executive committees, and presidents, I am humbled at the opportunity to serve in this role. As I have shared with our Division 20 team, I view my role as one that listens, facilitates, and takes the time to ensure that everyone's contributions are recognized for the brilliant work they are accomplishing, all in service to support Division 20's mission and its membership. I am already impressed by what our committee chairs have in store for you (a few of those initiatives and updates are shared here). For this presidential year, our throughline is about *how we adapt, grow, innovate, and belong.*

Aging is, in many ways, a series of transitions: in health, in relationships, in identity, and in the systems and policies that support us. These transitions can be disorienting. But they can also be a source of strength, revealing capacities for adaptation and growth that do not always show themselves in steadier times. They ask us to meet the moment, to understand what belonging looks like as our circumstances shift. And they remind us that change, however difficult, can open new and better paths forward for individuals and for the systems built to serve them. As scientists, researchers, clinicians, and advocates in the field of aging, we're facing our own moment of change, with a real opportunity to act collectively, not just individually, in the science, practice, and policy that shape aging in this country and across the globe.

This year's Division programming will build on the strong foundation laid by past presidential initiatives. It's an opportunity to explore our collective resilience and to bring forward new thinking on how we design, study, support, and advocate for the aging experience. We invite submissions that speak to the following themes:

- **Enhancing Resilience Through Transition:** For example, what are the psychological, social, biological, and/or policy-level sources of strength and adaptation as older adults (and the systems that support them) navigate change, life transitions, or loss?
- **Innovating Design and Methods at the Intersection of Health and Aging:** For example, what novel research designs, measurement, treatment, and intervention approaches, or technological, environmental, and policy innovations can advance our understanding of health and aging together?
- **Addressing Belonging and Meaning: For Those We Care For, and For Ourselves as a Collective:** For example, how do connection, belonging, and the policies that shape access to care, including caregiving, palliative care, and end-of-life experiences, influence well-being and quality of life?

I would like to end this entry by acknowledging the excellent work of our Division's Executive Committee in the past year; the wonderful contributions of Dr. Wally Boot, rotating off as past president, and Dr. Becky Allen, who served us so well as president this past year; and by welcoming Dr. Sherry Beaudreau as our incoming president-elect. It's an honor to serve with you all and to contribute to our field's continued growth and impact.

Division 20: Featured Article: *Tattoos and Aging*

By: Drs. Cecilia Poon, PhD, ABPP, Douglas Lane, PhD, ABPP & Rebecca S. Allen PhD, ABPP

According to a [Pew Research Center's study](#) in 2023, almost a third of all Americans have a tattoo. Among Americans age 65 and older, 13% have at least one tattoo. Some Division 20 members observed that tattoos have become increasingly visible at APA's Annual Conventions, suggesting a change in attitudes and behavior among psychologists. The Society of Clinical Geropsychology (Division 12-2) listserv recently had an engaging discussion about tattoos and aging, prompting the writing of this essay.

Reasons behind Tattoos

Tattoos may provide an avenue for identity development and exploration. The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) suggests some adolescents and young adults want to get tattooed because they are finding their identities, affiliations, and new ways of self-expression. The same may be true of older adults. In a small study on adults age 19 to 50, researchers concluded that tattoos could serve as a "physical embodiment of autobiographical memories" (Klug et al., 2024). A review on body alteration (i.e., tattoos, piercing, and body decoration such as wearing jewelry) concluded that aesthetics was the primary reason behind body alteration (Weiler et al., 2025).

Tattoos may be a family affair and a representation of meaningful attachment in aging families. Memorial tattoos elicit memories of loved ones, serve as reinforcers of mindful being via a visual cue, or assist in grief reconciliation (Cadell et al., 2022). Roggenkamp and colleagues (2017) discussed how skin art might inform clinical practice, stating, "Talking to patients about their tattoos can provide a valuable window into the psyche". Several listserv members mentioned getting their first tattoo in their 50s to honor a significant life event or relationship. Older adults may also get tattooed with younger family members or wear temporary tattoos as an "expected" part of a family event.

Tattoos and Military Culture

Roman soldiers were tattooed with unit markings. In indigenous American tribes, the Māori, and the Celts, tattoos were worn to intimidate foes. Tattoos have a long history in the U.S. military. During the American Revolution, sailors in the U.S. Navy wore tattoos identifying themselves as Americans, so they could not be forced into service with the Royal Navy if their ship was taken. In WWI, tattoos often served as identification in case the service member was killed or gravely injured. In WWII, the role of tattoos broadened but their use for identification declined. Some were expressions of pride and patriotism, commonly featuring symbols of the U.S, unit or service branch insignia, and patriotic slogans. Others were metaphorical, such as the swallow worn by sailors to signify having traveled 5,000 miles at sea. Yet others depicted loved ones (often a spouse or romantic partner), or a famous person such as a movie star. They were reminders of whom the service member was fighting for, or who was waiting for them back home.

Tattoos remained popular during the Korean War and Viet Nam War, taking on additional, darker themes. Slogans like "Born to Kill" became popular. Service members also returned to using tattoos as sources of identification, including wearing tattoos of their blood type. Memorial tattoos became a form of remembrance of fallen comrades. They also memorialized locations in which the person served and fought. Especially during Viet Nam, political symbols and rebellious slogans became popular.

Taboo of Tattoos

Although tattoos are often a mark of social status and protection in [indigenous cultures](#), there have been times in history when they were considered a mark of shame. Religiously, tattoos are sometimes prohibited (e.g., Jewish) or strongly discouraged (e.g., Muslim and some Christian denominations). Intergenerational tension may arise when younger and older generations do not share the same views about tattoos. While

some may strongly discourage tattoos because they reflect traumatic historical context, others reclaim identity narratives and express resilience via tattoos (e.g., [formerly enslaved women who survived sex trafficking](#) and [Jewish people who wanted to embrace their personal and family's history of the Holocaust](#)).

Tattoos and Ageism

Articles in popular media on tattoos and aging have focused on health implications, potential complications such as bruising while on blood thinners (e.g. [AARP's website](#)), doubting whether tattoo artists have adequate training working with aging skin, and tattoo appreciation or regret. In the US, it is illegal for minors to get tattoos in 45 states without parental permission. Although similar laws do not exist for older adults, some [adult children may state disapproval](#).

All adults have the right to self-expression. Aging should not diminish one's personal choice about their body and their money, or force them to change their beauty standards. When society discourages an older person from getting tattooed because we think it is too unconventional "for their age," we are perpetuating ageism.

Conclusion

Tattoo art gives us an opportunity to share stories and connect with people. They are expressions of love, grief, honor, pride, rebellion, healing, and creativity. Tattoos are part of our individual and collective history. As we age, our bodies, our skin, and our tattoos change. Tattoos may fade or get distorted but they grow with us and tell the stories of a life lived. Tattoos, like smile lines, stretch marks, and older adults themselves, are not something to hide, rather, something to embrace.

References:

Bridget Gibbons. (March 25, 2025). *The Legacy of WWII Tattoos: Stories of Ink, Sacrifice, and Memory*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/legacy-wwii-tattoos>

Cadell, S., Reid Lambert, M., Davidson, D., Greco, C., & Macdonald, M. E. (2022). Memorial tattoos: Advancing continuing bonds theory. *Death Studies*, 46(1), 132-139.

Klug, K., Camia, C., & Rohrmann, S. (2024). Tattoos embody autobiographical memories. *Memory, Mind & Media*, 3, e9.

Roggenkamp, H., Nicholls, A., & Pierre, J. M. (2017). Tattoos as a window to the psyche: How talking about skin art can inform psychiatric practice. *World Journal of Psychiatry*, 7(3), 148–158.
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Weiler, S. M., Mühlenbeck, C., & Jacobsen, T. (2025). Body alteration: On the mental function of body modification and body decoration. *Culture & Psychology*, 31(1), 181-223.

VFW Magazine. (August 17, 2016). *A Short History of Military Tattoos*. Retrieved from <https://www.vfw.org/media-and-events/latest-releases/archives/2016/8/a-short-history-of-military-tattoos>

Further Reading:

World history of tattoo: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/tattoos-worldwide-history-144038580/>

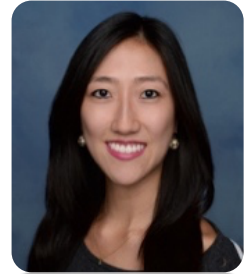
A Dutch photo project and a US photo project featuring older adults with tattoos:
<https://mymodernmet.com/getout-senior-citizens-with-tattoos/>
<https://dalemayphoto.myportfolio.com/forever-18-tattoo-seniors>

A video on Jacci Gresham, the first (and oldest) black female tattoo artist from New Orleans:

<https://vimeo.com/327059911>

Special Message from Our Mentorship Committee
Committee Co-Chairs: Chris Nguyen, Ph.D. & Jenny Yen, Ph.D.

My passion for mentorship is deeply rooted in my own journey as a first-generation Asian American immigrant and graduate student. I had some exceptional supervisors and mentors, while others taught me important lessons about the kind of psychologist, supervisor, and mentor I wanted to become. Many of my supervisory relationships reflected a traditional expert-novice model—reinforcing my perception of supervisors as gatekeepers of the profession. This dynamic and power imbalance made it difficult to acknowledge uncertainty, ask for help, make mistakes, advocate for my learning needs, or express a different perspective.



These experiences also shaped my awareness of how culture, identity, and power intersect with professional development. Externally, I presented as eager, over-prepared, and perfectionistic, but internally, I struggled with the fear of making a mistake, disappointing a supervisor, or jeopardizing future opportunities. Looking back, I recognize that much of this fear reflected what I now understand as imposter syndrome. Over time, I came to recognize how important it is for mentorship to create space for curiosity, vulnerability, and growth—not simply performance.

Now, as a licensed psychologist who has served as a training director, supervisor, and mentor, I have come to appreciate the unique possibilities of a mentorship model that is intentionally **mentee-centered**. Unlike evaluative supervision, mentorship can provide a space where mentees have greater agency to identify what they need, determine what they would like to explore, and shape the direction of the relationship. This creates an opportunity for connection, reflection, professional development, and growth outside of the traditional power dynamics of evaluation.

I am therefore thrilled to join Dr. Chris Nguyen as co-chair of the Mentorship Committee. This role feels especially meaningful because it allows me to give back in a way that reflects the mentorship experiences that have mattered most to me. I am passionate about creating mentorship spaces that are psychologically safe, culturally inclusive, collaborative, and welcoming to graduate students and early-career psychologists.

As I look ahead, I hope to expand the mentorship program beyond simply matching mentors and mentees. I envision cultivating a diverse community of connection and belonging, creating opportunities for mentors and mentees to learn from one another, facilitating meaningful conversations around professional identity and career transitions, and developing spaces where members can share wisdom, ask difficult questions, and support one another's growth.

I am excited about what we can build together. My hope is that the Mentorship Committee can help create the kind of professional community that many of us needed—and that I was fortunate enough to experience through the mentors who made such a lasting difference in my own journey: a community where we can be curious, imperfect, supported, challenged, and genuinely invested in one another's growth.

Jenny Yen, PsyD
Geropsychologist
Division 20 Adult Development & Aging
Co-chair Mentorship Program

Nominate a Colleague for Fellow Status!

Fellows Committee Co-Chairs: Drs. Michelle Mlinac & Shevaun Neuport (rotated off); New Co-Chair Dr. Karen Fingerman

Application for fellow status is open to any APA member who meets the criteria of both APA and Div 20. The requirements and access to the online application for Initial Fellow status are available on the [APA Fellows website](#). Division 20 criteria for fellowship status can be found [here](#).

Benefits of Becoming an APA Fellow

- **Professional Recognition:** Honors outstanding contributions to the field of psychology and affirms your expertise, reputation, and dedication.
- **Peer Acknowledgment:** Offers meaningful recognition from colleagues, affirming your impact and leadership in the profession.
- **Career Advancement:** Strengthens candidacy for promotions, leadership roles, and institutional support. Some organizations even provide financial or professional incentives.
- **Inspiration and Mentorship:** Serves as a model of excellence for students, early career psychologists, and underrepresented voices in the field.
- **Field-Wide Impact:** Elevates the importance of psychology as a profession and reinforces the influence of your specialty area within practice and research.
- **Division Recognition:** Reflects positively on your APA Division, showcasing its role in advancing the field through the achievements of its members.
- **Leadership Engagement:** Encourages the involvement of diverse and emerging psychologists in shaping the future of APA.

Interested applicants: please check with your D20 fellows chair Michelle Mlinac prior to starting an application to confirm the deadline for submitting an application to the division.

Advice for applicants and endorsers on submitting a successful application is also available on the APA Fellows website. Division 20 welcomes self- and other nominations for Fellow status in APA and the Division. There are two processes:

- (1) if you are currently not a Fellow in any APA Division, you would be applying for initial Fellow status; or
- (2) if you are a Fellow in another APA Division, and you are a member of Division 20, you can request consideration for Fellow status in Division 20.

Please note:

Initial fellows must have been a member of Division 20 for **at least 2 years**.

Members of APA who are already fellows of another Division be members of Division 20 for one year

Nominees should be aware of the importance of the nominee's self-statement, which must make clear exactly how the nominee has made "unusual and outstanding contributions or performance in the field of psychology" (an essential APA requirement). Such contributions must go well beyond those typically necessary for tenure or promotion recommendations for individuals in academic positions. Also, although not mandatory, evidence of involvement in APA in general and Division 20 in particular, is very helpful and greatly strengthens the application.

Recommenders must fill out two forms: one is called a “Worksheet” and contains a rating scale; the second form (the “Fellow Status Evaluation Form”) includes the actual letter of recommendation. Nominees are expected to send both forms to their recommenders (unless someone else is handling the entire nomination process). **The last day to submit all of the materials for Initial Fellow applications is December 1.**

The application process for individuals who are already Fellows of an APA Division requires only a current CV and brief cover letter sent directly to Michelle Mlinac PsyD ABPP michelle.mlinac@gmail.com. **The deadline for submitting materials for Current Fellows is April 1.**

Special Congratulations to our incoming Division 20 Fellows:

- Grace Caskie, Ph.D.
- Denis Gerstorf, Ph.D.
- Christopher Nguyen, Ph.D., ABPP