

Emotional benefits from friendships found to differ for Black, white Americans

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Black Americans and white Americans may receive different benefits

from their networks of friends, family ties and other relationships, according to a University of Michigan researcher.

A new study from U-M postdoctoral scholar Crystal Ng shows that while white American adults receive a positive boost to their mood through interactions with friends, Black Americans generally receive the same mood boost only from interacting with members of their family, church or other personal communities.

While some younger Black participants in the study reported a similar benefit to their moods as white respondents generally did, overall, Black respondents said they did not receive the same benefit from interacting with friends.

"The main finding is that interactions with friends were associated with a momentary increase in positive mood, but only among white adults and selective age groups of younger Black adults (aged 41 or younger)," Ng said. "In contrast, Black individuals, and not white individuals, showed an increased positive mood when interacting with all other [social ties](#) including spouses, extended family members and other nonfamily ties, like church members."

Ng, who has appointments at U-M's Institute for Social Research and Michigan Medicine's Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, surveyed 169 adults of all ages from ISR's Stress and Well-being in Everyday Life Study.

Participants were asked questions about their moods and interactions (face to face, phone, texts, [social media](#) and email) with friends, family and others several times a day over a four-day period. The responses were recorded electronically via a study smartphone provided to the participants.

Regardless of race, age or how they interacted with their friends, the value of friendships came through in the study, said Ng, who believes governments and other policymakers should take note.

The study, appearing in *The Gerontologist*, was conceived in an effort to examine the potential limits that various elements of structural racism in American society may have on friendships among Black adults.

Developing and maintaining friendships can take a great deal of time, effort and resources, and [minority groups](#) may not have the same access to those resources as others, leading to weaker friendships, Ng said.

"Friendship is a potentially modifiable social resource," she said. "Technically speaking, you can't ask people to have more family members. But you can potentially encourage individuals to form more friendships or reach out to existing friends. So, if governments and communities can devise or organize activities for people to interact with their friends or facilitate the formation of more friendships, that can be impactful."

More information: Yee To Ng et al, Friendships and Emotional Well-being in the Context of Race and Age, *The Gerontologist* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/geront/gnad007](https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnad007)

Provided by University of Michigan

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