

1      **Age, sex, and social environmental effects on immune cell composition in a free-ranging**  
2      **non-human primate**  
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33 **Abstract**

34 Increasing age is associated with dysregulated immune function and increased inflammation–  
35 patterns that are also observed in individuals exposed to chronic social adversity. Yet we still know  
36 little about how social adversity impacts the immune system and how it might promote age-related  
37 diseases. Here, we investigated how immune cell diversity varied with age, sex and social adversity  
38 (operationalized as low social status) in free-ranging rhesus macaques. We found age-related  
39 signatures of immunosenescence, including lower proportions of CD20+ B cells, CD20+/CD3+  
40 ratio, and CD4+/CD8+ T cell ratio – all signs of diminished antibody production. Age was  
41 associated with higher proportions of CD3+/CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells, CD16+/CD3- Natural Killer  
42 cells, CD3+/CD4+/CD25+ and CD3+/CD8+/CD25+ T regulatory cells, and CD14+/CD16+/HLA-  
43 DR+ intermediate monocytes, and lower levels of CD14+/CD16-/HLA-DR+ classical monocytes,  
44 indicating greater amounts of inflammation and immune dysregulation. We also found an effect  
45 of exposure to social adversity (i.e., low social status) that was sex-dependent. High-status males,  
46 relative to females, had higher CD20+/CD3+ ratios and CD16+/CD3 Natural Killer cell  
47 proportions, and lower proportions of CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells. Further, low status females had  
48 higher proportions of cytotoxic T cells than high status females, while the opposite was observed  
49 in males. High status males had higher CD20+/CD3+ ratios than low status males. Together, our  
50 study identifies immune cell types that differ by age in a human-relevant primate model animal,  
51 and demonstrates a novel link between sex-dependent immunity and social adversity.

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64 **Introduction**

65 The average human lifespan has almost doubled over the past century [1], accompanied by an  
66 increase in the prevalence of many age-related diseases, including cardiovascular disease,  
67 autoimmune disease, diabetes, arthritis, and cognitive decline [2-5]. As individuals age, there is a  
68 disruption in the homeostatic balance between innate and adaptive immunity linked to both  
69 increases in age-related disease and susceptibility to infection. This imbalance is reflective of two  
70 age-related alterations, namely increased inflammation (“inflammaging”) and a decline in adaptive  
71 immune function (“immunosenescence”) [6-7]. Both alterations disrupt the balance between pro-  
72 and anti-inflammatory mediators that characterize a healthy immune system. For example, with  
73 increasing age, innate immune cells such as monocytes become more active and release drivers of  
74 inflammation that include proinflammatory cytokines (e.g., TNF- $\alpha$ ) [8]. Adaptive immune cells,  
75 such as B cells and helper T cells, show age-related declines that directly impact long-term  
76 immunity, as exemplified by the lower effectiveness of vaccination in older individuals [9].

77

78 Yet these age-related alterations in immunity are not universal in their trajectories across  
79 individuals. There is substantial heterogeneity with age; not all individuals age at the same rate  
80 or fall victim to the same age-related diseases. For instance, some people become hypertensive  
81 in their 30s, while a 60-year-old may never suffer from this condition. Part of this heterogeneity  
82 is due to sex differences in the immune system, which alter the prevalence and onset of age-  
83 related diseases. For example, in many species, females mount a stronger immune response with  
84 increasing age compared to males [10-11]. Females also have a stronger age-related increase in  
85 inflammatory cells compared to males [12]. Further, in humans, older men are more susceptible  
86 to infections, such as leptospirosis, tuberculosis, and hepatitis A, than are women [13].

87

88 Heterogeneity in aging can also arise from life experiences, such as exposure to social adversity,  
89 which can influence the onset and progression of disease and, ultimately, mortality [14]. Social  
90 adversity, which is often associated with low social status, and other social stressors [15-16], has  
91 been linked to accelerated aging as indexed by biomarkers like epigenetic age and telomere  
92 attrition [17-19]. There are also broad similarities between the effects of age and social adversity  
93 on peripheral immune function [20]. For instance, early life social adversity in humans has been  
94 linked to increases in proinflammatory T cells [21] – a characteristic usually seen with increasing

95 age. Further, various adversities and social stressors are associated with a decrease in naïve CD4  
96 T helper cells and an increase in naïve CD8 T cells [22], pointing to how the social environment  
97 can shape immunity. However, the extent to which social adversity may be associated with  
98 immunity across the lifecourse remains unknown. Social adversity might lead to accelerated aging-  
99 related disease onset and death and/or social advantage may confer protection from the effects of  
100 aging.

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102 Social structures in human populations are complex and multifaceted, including structural  
103 inequities and discrimination, and these factors can vary across cultures. Thus, it can be difficult  
104 to measure how social adversity “gets under the skin” in humans to affect immune and overall  
105 health. Rhesus macaques (*Macaca mulatta*), a non-human primate, are an established animal  
106 model that exhibits aging trajectories similar to humans, such as decreases in mobility, but  
107 compressed into a lifespan 3-4x times shorter [23]. Aging parallels are also manifested at the  
108 molecular level: rhesus macaques and humans show similar age-related alterations in immune cell  
109 DNA methylation and gene expression [24]. Rhesus macaques also share many social factors with  
110 humans including the expression of affiliative behaviors, despotism, among other behaviors [25],  
111 making them an ideal animal model for translational aging research.

112

113 In rhesus macaques, exposure to social adversity can be captured by measures of social status (i.e.,  
114 dominance rank). Social status is acquired differently for males and females [26-27]: females  
115 inherit status from their mothers, while males typically disperse from their natal group and enter a  
116 new group where they acquire status through a combination of “queuing” and physical contests  
117 [28-29]. Similar to humans, social status in macaques patterns access to resources, and can impact  
118 health and lifespan [30-32]. For instance, low status macaques experience more conspecific  
119 aggression and are therefore more likely to be injured [33], and high status female macaques can  
120 live longer than those with lower status [34]. In addition, social status affects immunity in rhesus  
121 macaques; one experimental study showed that social status predicts gene expression patterns in  
122 peripheral blood mononuclear cells [35].

123 Here, we characterized age-related variation in immune cell types, as well as the influence of social  
124 adversity and sex on immune cell composition. To do so, we studied a free-ranging population of  
125 rhesus macaques living on the island of Cayo Santiago, Puerto Rico where we were able to

126 simultaneously document age, sex, and social status in a semi-naturalistic social setting with  
127 minimal human intervention [36].

128

## 129 **Methods**

130 *Study population:*

131 Cayo Santiago is an island located off the southeastern coast of Puerto Rico inhabited  
132 by approximately 1,600 rhesus macaques. The population is managed by the Caribbean Primate  
133 Research Center (CPRC) and is the oldest primate field station in the world [37]. Cayo  
134 Santiago provides unique research opportunities for behavioral, physiological, demographic,  
135 morphological and genomic studies. The Cayo Santiago Field Station has a minimal intervention  
136 policy, which means that the animals are not managed medically or reproductively. There are no  
137 predators on the island, and senescent phenotypes are commonly observed in this population  
138 [24,38-41]. The animals are direct descendants of rhesus macaques introduced from India in 1938;  
139 since 1957 these animals have been continuously monitored [42]. The animals are identified with  
140 tattoos and ear notches, and demographic data such as age, sex and pedigree have been collected  
141 for decades. During the annual capture and release period, researchers have the opportunity to  
142 collect biological and morphological samples with the assistance of CPRC veterinary staff. For the  
143 past 15 years, the Cayo Biobank Research Unit has collected detailed behavioral data to combine  
144 with the biological samples collected each year. In combination, these data provide the opportunity  
145 to test the relationships between the social environment, immune function, and aging.

146

147 *Blood sampling:*

148 We collected whole blood from sedated rhesus macaques over three capture and release periods  
149 (n=96 in October - December 2019, n=153 in October 2020 - February 2021 and n=120 in October  
150 2021 - February 2022). Samples were collected in 6ml K2 EDTA tubes (Beckton, Dickson and  
151 Company, cat #367899). We collected a total of 369 samples (200 from males, 169 from females)  
152 from 230 unique individuals (113 males, 117 females; i.e., some animals were sampled across  
153 multiple years of the study), spanning the natural lifespan of macaques on Cayo Santiago (mean  
154 age = 11.8 years, range 0-28 years; **Figure 1A and 1B**). Fresh blood samples were transported at  
155 4°C to the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences campus where flow cytometric analysis  
156 was performed within 6 hours of sample collection.

157

158 *Antibodies and flow cytometric analysis:*

159 An 8-panel antibody cocktail previously validated in rhesus macaques [43-46], consisting of the  
160 following antibodies, was used: CD20-PacBlue/Clone 2H7 (Biolegend), CD3-PerCP/Clone SP34-  
161 2 (BD), CD4-APC/Clone L200 (BD), CD8-Viogreen/Clone BW135/80 (Miltenyi), CD25-  
162 PE/Clone 4E3 (Miltenyi), CD14-FITC/Clone M5E2 (BD), CD16-PEVio770/Clone REA423  
163 (Miltenyi), HLA-DR-APCVio770/Clone REA805 (Miltenyi).

164

165 We performed phenotypic characterization of rhesus macaque peripheral blood mononuclear cells  
166 (PBMCs) using multicolor flow cytometry with direct immunofluorescence (View **S. Figure 1** for  
167 gating strategy and **Table S1** for Ab panel) on all 369 animals. Aliquots of 150  $\mu$ l of heparinized  
168 whole blood were incubated with a mix of the antibodies described for 30 minutes at 25°C (room  
169 temperature). After incubation, the red blood cells were fixed and lysed with BD FACS fix and  
170 lyse solution (Cat #349202). Cells were washed twice using PBS containing 0.05% BSA at 1,700  
171 RPM for 5 minutes and processed in a MACSQuant Analyzer 10 flow cytometer (Miltenyi Biotec,  
172 CA).

173

174 Lymphocytes and monocytes were gated based on their characteristic forward scatter (measures  
175 cells based on their size) and side scatter (measures cells based on their granularity) patterns.  
176 Lymphocytes were then further subdivided according to their cell surface markers. Natural killer  
177 (NK) cells were defined as the CD3- and CD16+ population; B cells were defined as CD20+  
178 population and T cells as the CD3+ population. We further subdivided T cells from the CD3+ gate  
179 into CD4+ and CD8+ populations. CD4+CD25+ and CD8+CD25+ T regulatory cells were further  
180 gated from the CD4+ and CD8+ gates. Monocytes were gated based on the combined expression  
181 of the HLA-DR/CD14 markers for classical monocytes, HLA-DR/CD16 markers for non-classical  
182 monocytes, and HLA-DR/CD14/CD16 for intermediate monocytes (**S. Figure 2**). Flow cytometry  
183 gating was performed using Flowjo version 10.7.1 (FlowJo LLC Ashland, OR).

184

185 To obtain an accurate representation of the proportions of cell types, we counted only the stained  
186 events of the cells of interest and calculated their proportions based on the subsets of lymphocytes  
187 and monocytes. To calculate cell ratios, such as CD20+ B cell to CD3+ T cell ratio (CD20+/CD3+

188 ratio) and CD4+ T cell to CD8+ T cell ratio (CD4+/CD8+ ratio), we divided the calculated  
189 proportion of these cell types in each individual sample (e.g., CD20+ B cell/ CD3+ T cell and  
190 CD4+/CD8+ respectively). (Calculations detailed in **Table S2**).

191

192 *Quantification of social adversity (social status):*

193 We quantified the social status of a subset of animals for which we had behavioral data (**Figure**  
194 **1C**, n = 250 total samples, 134 from males and 116 from females & n = 145 unique individuals,  
195 73 males and 72 females). We calculated social status (i.e., dominance rank) using the outcomes  
196 of win-loss dominance interactions between pairs of same sex adult groupmates. Because of the  
197 different routes through which males and females acquire their status, we quantified social status  
198 separately for males and females within each group for each year of the study [47-48].  
199 Observations of adult animals (older than 6 years) were collected from two different social groups,  
200 groups V and F, in the year prior to sample collection. In 2019 and 2021, behavioral data were  
201 collected using a previously established 10-minute focal sampling protocol [26]. Briefly, the  
202 protocol consisted of recording state behaviors (e.g., resting, feeding) and agonistic encounters,  
203 which included recording the identity of the focal animal and their social partner. Win-loss  
204 agonistic interactions included threat and submissive behaviors, along with contact and non-  
205 contact aggression. In 2019 and 2021 we also collected additional agonistic interactions *ad-*  
206 *libitum*. In 2020, all agonistic interactions were collected *ad-libitum* due to restrictions imposed  
207 on behavioral data collection due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In all years, we used known  
208 maternal relatedness to settle behavioral gaps in the female hierarchy [49]. To control for variation  
209 in group size, social status (i.e., dominance rank) was quantified as the percentage of same-sex  
210 adults that an animal outranked in their group. For all analyses, we grouped animals into one of  
211 two social status categories: high-rank (>80% of same-sex adults outranked) and low-rank (< 79%  
212 of same-sex adults outranked)[50].

213 *Statistical analysis:*

214 All statistical analyses were performed using R statistical software R version 4.2.3 [51].  
215 First, we performed a principal component analysis of the cell composition data for all samples (n  
216 = 369, 230 unique individuals) using the *prcomp* function of the *stats* package. Next, we employed  
217 a linear additive mixed-effects approach, using the *lmer* function in the *lmerTest* package to run

218 sample projections on principal components as a function of age (in years), sex, and sample period  
219 - to control for the technical variation in the flow cytometer lasers, which changed over the  
220 sampling years (*model 1 - Table S3*) and individual ID as a random effect. We also modeled  
221 sample projections on principal components as a function of the interaction between age and sex  
222 (age\*sex) and sampling period - which will ultimately allow us to identify possible sex-dependent  
223 associations with age - and individual ID as a random effect (*model 2 - Table S3*).

224

225 To evaluate each cell type at a more granular level, we employed the same additive linear mixed-  
226 effects to test the proportion of each cell type and certain cell type ratios (e.g., CD4+/CD8+) as a  
227 function of age, sex, and sample period with individual ID as a random effect (*model 3 - Table*  
228 **S3**). Finally, we tested the proportion of each cell type and certain cell type ratios (e.g.,  
229 CD4+/CD8+) as a function of the interaction between age and sex (age\*sex) and sampling period  
230 with individual ID as a random effect (*model 4 - Table S3*).

231

232 For the subset of samples in which information on social status was available (n = 250 total  
233 samples, 145 unique individuals), we tested for the additive effect of principal component  
234 projections as a function of social status, age, sex and sample period, with individual ID and social  
235 group as a random effect (*model 5 - Table S3*). We also tested for the principal component  
236 interaction between status and age (status\*age) and between status and sex (status\*sex), with  
237 individual ID and social group as a random effect (*model 6 - Table S3*). We then additively tested  
238 the proportion of each cell type and certain cell type ratios as a function of social status, age, sex,  
239 and sample period (*model 7 - Table S3*). To test whether the relationship between the proportion  
240 of cell types and social status depended on sociodemographic variables, we tested the interaction  
241 between: social status and age (status\*age) and for social status and sex (status\*sex, *model 8 -*  
242 **Table S3**). Furthermore, since we identified interactions between social status and sex, and since  
243 social status is acquired differently for male and females in rhesus macaques, we fitted a separate  
244 model for males and females to test if there was a main effect of social status within each sex on  
245 the proportions of different cell types. Age and sample period were also included in the model to  
246 control for these covariates (*model 9 - Table S3*).

247

248 The linear models and sample sizes for each are summarized in **Table S3**. For every predictor  
249 variable in the full ( $n = 369$ ) and status ( $n = 250$ ) datasets, we corrected for multiple hypothesis  
250 tests using the Benjamini Hochberg FDR approach and considered significant associates at FDR  
251  $< 0.10$ . Because Model 7 was only performed in cell types that showed a significant interaction  
252 between sex and social status (and not all the cell types measured), we did not correct for multiple  
253 testing in this model.

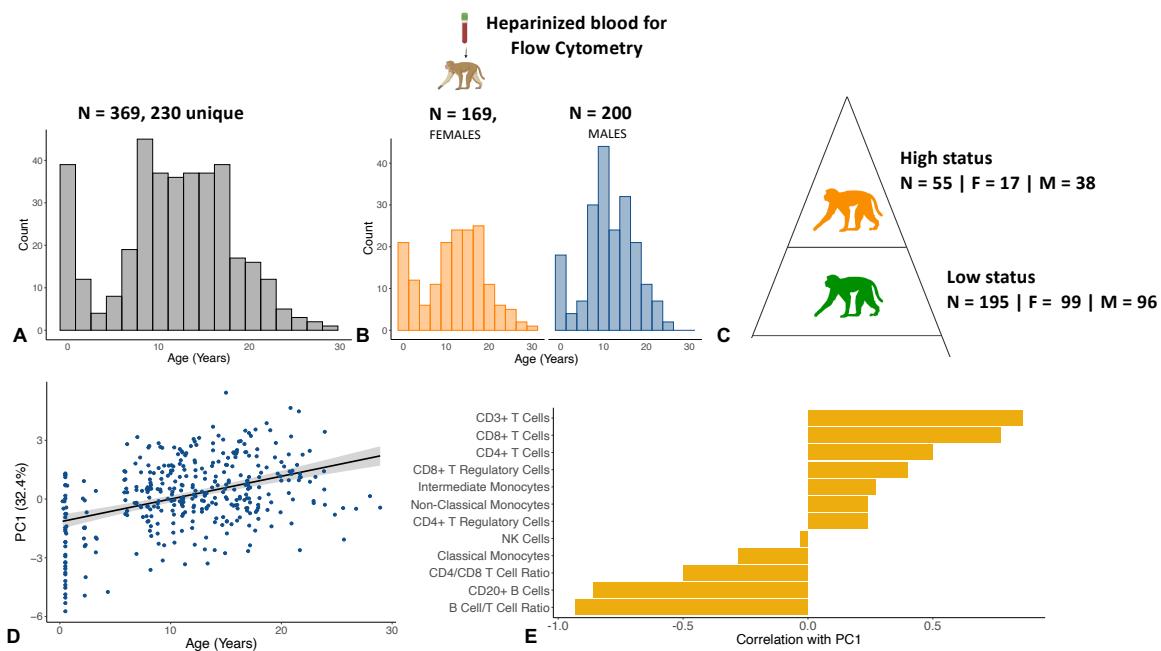
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## 255 **Results**

### 256 **Macaques exhibit age-related variation in immune cell composition and inflammation**

257 Age was significantly positively associated with the first principal component (PC) of immune cell  
258 composition (*model 1* -  $\beta_{PC1 \text{ age}} = 0.14$ , FDR =  $7.2 \times 10^{-18}$ , **Figure 1D**). This first PC, which  
259 explained 32.4% of the variance in cell composition across all samples, was associated with higher  
260 proportions of inflammation-associated cell types, such as cytotoxic T cells and regulatory T cells,  
261 and lower proportions of cells involved in pathogen clearance, including CD20+ B cells and  
262 classical monocytes (**Figure 1E, Table S4**). Thus, older animals exhibited a pattern of greater  
263 inflammation and immunosenescence than younger individuals did.

264



265

266 **Figure 1: Sample collection and demographics.** A) We collected 369 whole blood samples from  
267 230 unique individuals across three years, and quantified immune cell proportions using flow

268 cytometry. **B)** The dataset was roughly balanced between males and females and captured the  
269 entire natural lifespan of macaques in this population. **C)** We calculated social status by assigning  
270 dominance ranks to 250 samples using observational data collected in the year before each sample  
271 was collected. Animals were assigned to one of three dominance ranks: high, medium, and low.  
272 The social status dataset is a subset of the original age dataset because behavioral data were not  
273 available for all study animals (i.e., it is not collected for infants and juveniles). **D)** PC1 of immune  
274 cell compositions is significantly associated with age ( $\beta_{PC1} = 0.14$ , FDR =  $7.2 \times 10^{-18}$ ). **E)** The T  
275 cell compartment is positively associated with PC1 (and thus age), while the B cell compartment  
276 is negatively associated with PC1 of immune cell composition.

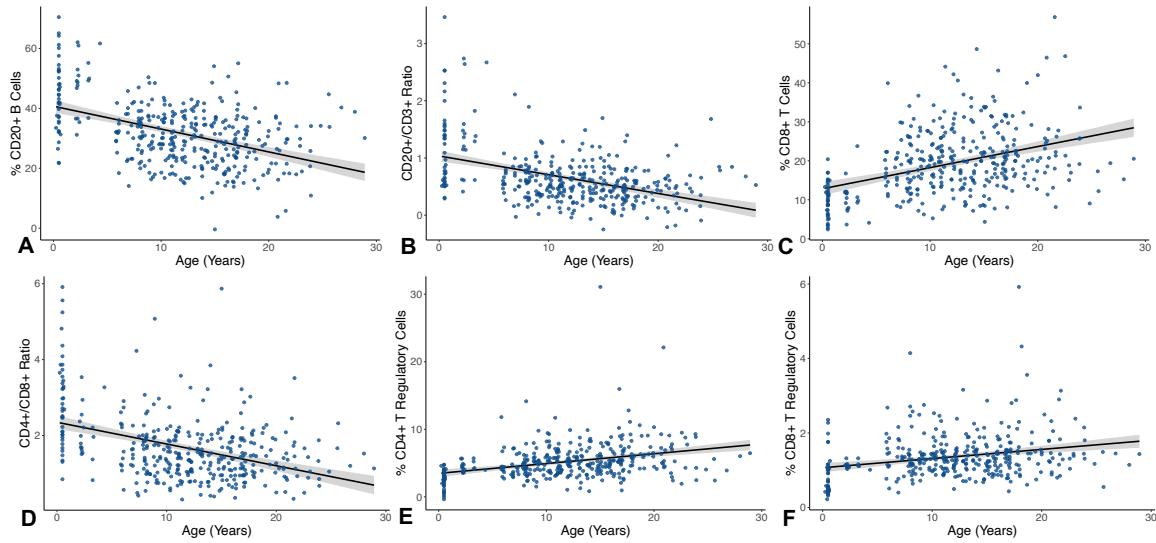
277

278 We then conducted a more granular analysis of the factors associated with the proportions of  
279 individual cell types. Age was significantly associated with signatures of immunosenescence,  
280 including a decline in adaptive immune cells. This was largely driven by lower proportions of  
281 CD20+ B cells in older individuals (*model 3* -  $\beta_{CD20 \text{ age}} = -0.83 \pm 0.09$ , FDR =  $1.3 \times 10^{-16}$ , **Figure**  
282 **2A**), which resulted in significantly lower CD20+/CD3+ ratios in older individuals (*model 3* -  
283  $\beta_{CD20:CD3 \text{ age}} = -0.04 \pm 0.004$ , FDR =  $4.9 \times 10^{-15}$ , **Figure 2B**). Age was also associated with higher  
284 proportions of inflammation-related cells. The proportion of cytotoxic CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells  
285 was significantly higher in older animals (*model 3* -  $\beta_{CD8 \text{ age}} = 0.60 \pm 0.07$ , FDR =  $3.2 \times 10^{-14}$ ,  
286 **Figure 2C**), resulting in a strong and significant effect of lower CD4+/CD8+ ratios (*model 3* -  
287  $\beta_{CD4:CD8 \text{ age}} = -0.06 \pm 0.008$ , FDR =  $4.3 \times 10^{-14}$ , **Figure 2D**) and higher proportions of CD3+ T cells  
288 in older individuals (*model 3* -  $\beta_{CD3} = 0.67 \pm 0.11$ , FDR =  $2.2 \times 10^{-8}$ , **S. Figure 3**).

289

290 Next, we examined the less abundant but immunologically important regulatory CD8+ and CD4+  
291 T cell populations (CD25+), which are involved in immune suppression and maintenance of self-  
292 tolerance [52] (i.e., the ability to recognize self-antigens). Both CD4+ and CD8+ T regulatory cells  
293 were significantly more abundant in older animals (*model 3* - CD3+CD4+CD25+:  $\beta_{\text{age}} = 0.16 \pm$   
294  $0.02$ , FDR =  $3.6 \times 10^{-10}$ , **Figure 2E**; *model 3* - CD3+CD8+CD25+:  $\beta_{\text{age}} = 0.03 \pm 0.005$ , FDR =  
295  $1.8 \times 10^{-6}$ , **Figure 2F**), suggesting a reduced age-related ability to regulate endogenous and  
296 exogenous antigens.

297



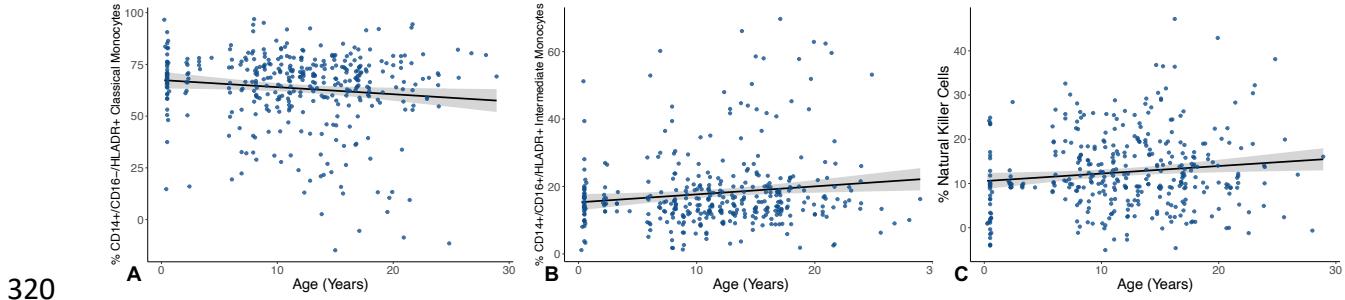
298

299 **Figure 2: Age-associated differences in adaptive immune cell proportions. A)** CD20+ B cells  
300 ( $\beta_{CD20} = -0.83 \pm 0.09$ , FDR =  $1.3 \times 10^{-16}$ ) proportions and **B)** CD20+/CD3+ ratio ( $\beta_{CD20:CD3} = -0.04 \pm 0.004$ , FDR =  $4.9 \times 10^{-15}$ ) are lower in older individuals. **C)** CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells ( $\beta_{CD8} = 0.60 \pm 0.07$ , FDR =  $3.2 \times 10^{-14}$ ) are higher in older individuals, while the **D)** CD4+/CD8+ T cell ratio ( $\beta_{CD4:CD8} = -0.06 \pm 0.008$ , FDR =  $4.3 \times 10^{-14}$ ) is lower in older individuals. **E)** CD4+ T regulatory cells ( $\beta = 0.16 \pm 0.02$ , FDR =  $3.6 \times 10^{-10}$ ) and **F)** CD8+ T regulatory cells are higher in older individuals compared to younger individuals ( $\beta = 0.03 \pm 0.005$ , FDR =  $1.8 \times 10^{-6}$ ), possibly because of higher baseline levels of inflammation (i.e., inflammaging).

307

308 Innate immune cells also showed significant associations with age. Classical monocytes (HLA-  
309 DR+/CD14+/CD16-), which are involved in phagocytosis and extracellular pathogen clearance  
310 [53], were lower in older individuals (*model 3* -  $\beta_{CD14++ age} = -0.31 \pm 0.16$ , FDR = 0.07, **Figure 3A**), while intermediate monocytes (HLA-DR+/CD14+/CD16+), involved in immune cell  
311 recruitment and proinflammatory cytokine secretion [53], were higher in older individuals (*model 3* -  $\beta_{CD14+CD16+ age} = 0.21 \pm 0.09$ , FDR = 0.04, **Figure 3B**). The proportion of CD16+CD3- NK cells  
312 – which have a similar role to CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells presenting natural cytotoxicity but are not  
313 antigen specific – was also significantly higher in older individuals (*model 3* -  $\beta_{NK age} = 0.17 \pm 0.07$ ,  
314 FDR = 0.03, **Figure 3C**). Together, these results indicate that older individuals show a decrease  
315 in adaptive immunity along with an increase in inflammation-related innate immune cells  
316 compared to younger individuals, potentially disrupting a “healthy” homeostatic immune system.

319



320  
321 **Figure 3: Age is associated with variation in innate immune cell proportions. A)**  
322 CD14+/CD16-/HLADR+ Classical monocytes ( $\beta_{CD14++} = -0.31 \pm 0.16$ , FDR = 0.07) are lower and  
323 **B)** CD14+/CD16+/HLADR+ intermediate monocytes ( $\beta_{CD14+CD16+} = 0.21 \pm 0.09$ , FDR = 0.04) are  
324 higher in older individuals, while **C)** CD16+ NK cells ( $\beta_{NK} = 0.17 \pm 0.07$ , FDR = 0.03) are higher  
325 in older individuals.

326  
327 We did not observe statistically significant main effects of sex (*model 3* in *Methods*) or a sex-age  
328 interaction (*model 4* in *Methods*) on immune cell proportions. Nevertheless, a trend toward sex  
329 differences was observed in both the proportions of CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells (*model 3* -  $\beta_{CD8 \text{ sex}} =$   
330  $2.19 \pm 0.95$ , FDR = 0.14) and in the CD4+/CD8+ ratio (*model 3* -  $\beta_{CD4:CD8 \text{ sex}} = -0.24 \pm 0.09$ , FDR  
331 = 0.14, **S. Figure 4**), with males having a higher proportion of CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells compared  
332 to females, and females having a higher CD4+/CD8+ ratio compared to males, suggesting  
333 a stronger adaptive immune response in females, which, in part, is generated by CD4+ T helper  
334 cells.

335  
336 **Social status and immune cell composition**  
337 There was a significant interaction between social status and sex on PC1 (31% of the variance in  
338 cell composition across all samples) of immune cell composition (*model 6* -  $\beta_{PC1\text{-sex}*status} = -1.7 \pm$   
339  $0.63$ , FDR = 0.04, **Figure 4A**), documenting the sex-dependent impact of social status on  
340 immunity.

341  
342 When modeling males and females together in an additive modeling framework, we found no  
343 significant effects of social status on immune cell proportions (all FDR > 0.10, *model 7* in  
344 *Methods*), or between the interaction between social status and age (*model 8* in *Methods*).  
345 However, we found many significant interactions between social status and sex on immune cell

346 composition (*model 8* in *Methods*). Because social status is acquired differently for male and  
347 female rhesus macaques, we also carried out post-hoc analyses of the social status effects within  
348 each sex separately (*model 9* in *Methods*).

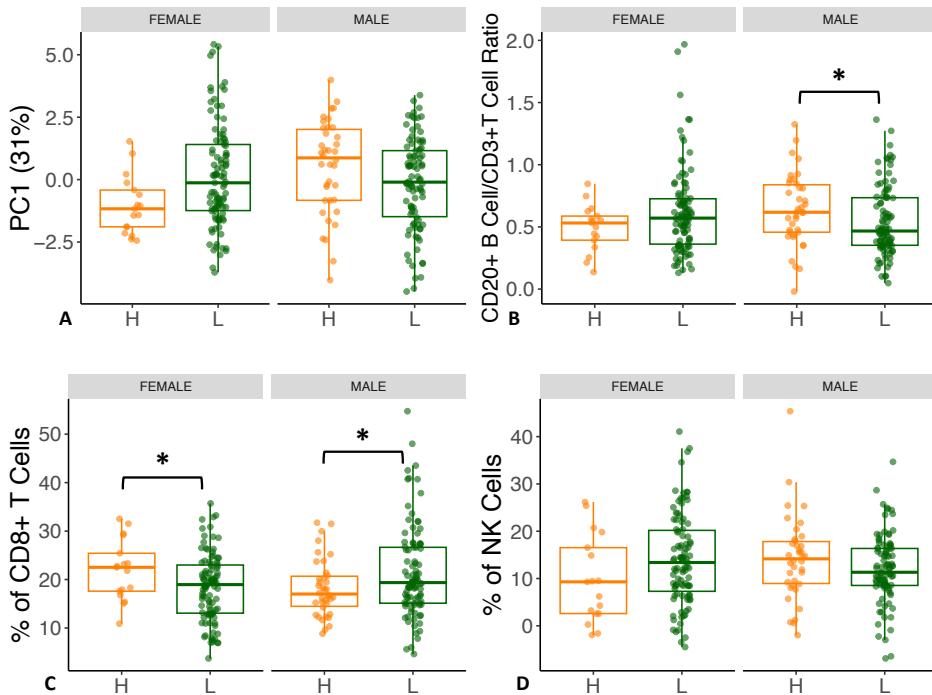
349  
350 The CD20+/CD3+ ratio interacted between social status and sex such that it was higher in males  
351 of high social status, but lower in females with high social status (*model 8* -  $\beta_{CD20/CD3\text{ ratio-sex*status}} =$   
352  $-0.26 \pm 0.11$ , FDR = 0.06, **Figure 4B**), both part of the adaptive immune system. This difference  
353 in the CD20+/CD3+ ratio seems to be partially driven by interaction between sex and social status  
354 on the proportion of CD3+ T cells (*model 8* -  $\beta_{CD3\text{-sex*status}} = 11.8 \pm 4.42$ , FDR = 0.04, **S. Figure**  
355 **5**), such that CD3+ T cells were higher in low social status males, but this pattern was flipped  
356 in females. There was a within-sex main effect of social status in males in the CD20+/CD3+ ratio,  
357 with high social status males having a significantly higher ratio than low social status males did  
358 (*model 9* -  $\beta_{CD20/CD3\text{ ratio-males/status}} = -1.3 \pm 0.06$ , p = 0.04, **Figure 4B**). No significant effect of social  
359 status on the CD20+/CD3+ ratio was found in females (*model 9* -  $\beta_{CD20/CD3\text{ ratio-females/status}} = 0.10 \pm$   
360  $0.13$ , p = 0.19).

361  
362 Additionally, there was a significant interaction between social status and sex in the proportion of  
363 CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells (*model 8* -  $\beta_{CD8\text{-sex*status}} = 8.3 \pm 2.94$ , FDR = 0.04, **Figure 4C**), which were  
364 higher in high social status males, but this relationship again flipped females. Our within-sex  
365 analysis revealed a significant main effect of CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells, in which low social status  
366 males had significantly higher proportions of this cell type than did high social status males (*model*  
367  $9 - \beta_{CD8\text{-males/status}} = 4 \pm 1.8$ , p = 0.03, **Figure 4C**). The opposite main effect was observed in females,  
368 in which high status females had significantly higher proportions of CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells than  
369 did low social status females (*model 9 - \beta\_{CD8\text{-females/status}} = -4.8 \pm 2.1, p = 0.03, **Figure 4C**).*

370  
371 In the innate arm of the immune system, we detected an interaction between social status and sex  
372 on the proportion of CD3-CD16+ NK cells (*model 8* -  $\beta_{NK\text{-sex*status}} = -7.9 \pm 3.2$ , FDR = 0.05, **Figure**  
373 **4D**), where the proportion was lower in males of low status, but higher in females of low status.  
374 Social status approached significance in the proportions of CD3-CD16+ NK cells in females  
375 (*model 9 - \beta\_{NK\text{-females/status}} = 5.6 \pm 3, p = 0.06, **Figure 4D**), in which low social status females  
376 displayed higher proportions of this cell type compared to high social status females. We found no*

377 significant main effect of social status on CD3-CD16+ NK cells in males (*model 9* -  $\beta_{\text{NK-males}/\text{status}} = -2.27 \pm 3.4$ ,  $p = 0.18$ ).

379



380

381 **Figure 4: Sex and social status interact to impact immune cell composition.** **A)** PC1 (31% of  
382 the variation in the dataset,  $\beta_{\text{PC1-sex}/\text{status}} = -1.7$ , FDR = 0.03) recapitulates the interaction between  
383 sex and social status. **B)** Interaction in the CD20+/CD3+ ratio ( $\beta_{\text{CD20/CD3 ratio-sex}/\text{status}} = -0.25 \pm 0.05$ ,  
384 FDR = 0.06) shows that this ratio is higher with higher social status in males while it is lower with  
385 higher social status in females; within-sex analysis show that high social status males have a  
386 significantly higher ratio than low social status males ( $\beta_{\text{CD20/CD3 ratio-males}/\text{status}} = -1.3 \pm 0.06$ ,  $p =$   
387 0.04). **C)** CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells show an interaction ( $\beta_{\text{CD8-sex}/\text{status}} = 8.3 \pm 2.94$ , FDR = 0.04)  
388 where this cell type is higher in lower social status in males, while it is higher in high social status  
389 females. Within-sex analysis of CD8+ T cells showed low social status males had significantly  
390 higher proportions of this cell type than did high social status males ( $\beta_{\text{CD8-males}/\text{status}} = 4 \pm 1.8$ ,  $p =$   
391 0.03), while the opposite effect was observed in females ( $\beta_{\text{CD8-females}/\text{status}} = -4.8 \pm 2.1$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ).  
392 **D)** Interaction in the proportion of NK Cells ( $\beta_{\text{NK-sex}/\text{status}} = -7.9 \pm 3.2$ , FDR = 0.05), with high  
393 social status males showing higher proportions, while high social status females show lower  
394 proportions.

395

396 **Discussion**

397 We examined how social status, age, and sex were related to immune cell distributions in a large  
398 sample of adult rhesus macaques living in semi-natural conditions. Overall, we found strong and  
399 consistent signatures of age-related immune cell dysregulation. We also identified significant links  
400 between social status and sex in cells of innate and adaptive arms of the immune system. Together,  
401 this variation is likely to influence immune responses to pathogenic challenges as well as the  
402 development of inflammation-related diseases.

403

404 Overall, macaques exhibited age-related differences in immune cells similar to those observed in  
405 humans, including declines in lymphocytes [54]. Here, we also identified more specific cell types  
406 with age-related differences. We detected lower proportions of CD20+ B cells at older ages, which  
407 may reflect immunosenescence, as these cells are responsible for antibody production, pathogen  
408 clearance, and are key cells in the generation of immune memory. Further, a key factor underlying  
409 the limited efficacy of vaccines in older individuals is a weakened B cell response [55]; B cells  
410 have also been associated with protection against certain types of cancer, such as lung cancer [56].

411

412 Similar to two other studies in captive macaques, we found higher CD8+ T cell proportions at  
413 older ages [67-58]. Notably, this differs from findings in humans, where both CD8+ Cytotoxic T  
414 cells and their effector responses (i.e., stimulus responsiveness) exhibit lower proportions at older  
415 ages [59]. It is possible that this discrepancy is only reflected in the overall CD8+ cytotoxic T cell  
416 pool, as it has been reported that certain CD8+ T cell subsets – such as memory subsets – increase  
417 in proportion and efficacy with age [60]. Alternatively, given that CD8+ T cell subsets have been  
418 associated with inflammation and ‘inflammaging’ [61], there is a possibility that higher overall  
419 CD8+ Cytotoxic T cell pool in rhesus macaques is indicative of higher levels of inflammation. The  
420 age-related reduction in CD4+/CD8+ ratio corroborates this hypothesis. In support of increased  
421 inflammation with age, we found that older animals had significantly higher CD3-CD16+ NK cell  
422 proportions in our dataset. Similar to CD8+ Cytotoxic T cells, CD3-CD16+ NK cells respond to  
423 intracellular pathogens, secrete multiple proinflammatory mediators, and are crucial during tumor  
424 surveillance and signaling [62]. The higher proportions of CD3-CD16+ NK cells predict a higher  
425 incidence of inflammation and/or tissue injury in the older population, which is commonly  
426 observed in the Cayo Santiago macaque population [33]. As expected, CD4+CD25+ T regulatory

427 cells as well as CD8+CD25+ T regulatory cells were associated with age, indicating higher levels  
428 of inflammation in older individuals [63]. These results, together with lower levels of CD20+ B  
429 cell proportions and higher levels of CD8+ T cell and CD3-CD16+ NK cell proportions, further  
430 support the hypothesis that the adaptive immune response in rhesus macaques decreases with age  
431 and inflammation-related cell types increase (i.e., ‘inflammaging’). Taken together, these  
432 alterations may drive biological and physiological decline that likely increases the risk of  
433 morbidity and mortality in macaques, as it does in humans.

434

435 Monocyte proportions also varied with age. Specifically, we found fewer CD14+ classical  
436 monocytes in older animals. These cells are phagocytic cells that ingest pathogens that they  
437 encounter [64]. This age-related reduction may indicate a reduction in phagocytosis (ingestion of  
438 pathogens by classical monocytes) and thus can possibly increase infections in older individuals.  
439 In addition, older individuals had higher proportions of CD14+/CD16+ intermediate monocytes,  
440 which are strongly associated with inflammation [65]. For instance, an increase in this cell type  
441 has been linked to disorders such as chronic kidney disease [66]. The decrease in classical  
442 monocytes, together with an increase in intermediate monocytes, represents yet another signature  
443 of immunosenescence and inflammaging.

444

445 One of the strengths of our study system was the ability to quantify social adversity,  
446 operationalized as social status, and test if and how social status influenced immune variation and  
447 whether the effects of status varied with age and/or sex. We found no main effect of social status  
448 on the proportion of immune cell types. Also, there was no interaction between social status and  
449 age on the proportions of immune cell types. This result was contrary to our expectations because  
450 we expected low social status individuals to experience more variation in immune cell types with  
451 increasing age. Nevertheless, we found several interactions between social status and sex, as well  
452 as a within-sex main effect of social status on immune cell composition, possibly reflecting the  
453 different pathways through which social status is acquired in males and females and thus  
454 highlighting the fact that different sexes experience social adversity differently across the  
455 hierarchy.

456

457 The interaction of social status and sex influenced adaptive and innate immune cell types such as  
458 CD20+/CD3+ ratio and CD8+ T cells and CD3-CD16+ NK cells, where the proportions of these  
459 cell types associated with status depended on the sex of the individual. In humans, social stressors,  
460 such as lower socioeconomic status and lower subjective social status, can affect cytokine release  
461 and inflammatory responses in peripheral blood mononuclear cells in a sex-dependent manner [67-  
462 68]. However, studies in humans that have looked at the interaction between social stressors (such  
463 as socioeconomic status) and sex on immune cell proportions have found no significant interaction  
464 between these covariates [22], thus making our study unique in reporting sex-dependent effects of  
465 social status.

466

467 We also found a significant main effect of social status in the within-sex analysis on the CD20+ B  
468 cell/CD3+ ratio, with high social status males having significantly higher ratios than low status  
469 males. The decrease in the CD20+/CD3+ ratio seems to be driven by a decrease in the proportions  
470 of CD3+ T cells in low social status males (**S. Figure 5**) compared to high status males. Decreases  
471 in this cell type have been associated with decreases in cell-mediated immunity to bacteria and  
472 viruses [69-70], potentially showing that the T cell response in macaques is negatively affected by  
473 low social status. In addition, CD8+ T cell proportions were higher in low social status males  
474 compared to high social status macaques. Few prior studies have assessed sociality-related immune  
475 cell differences in male rhesus [71], likely because of ethical and husbandry constraints, such as  
476 aggressive behavior between males. One study in male Barbary macaques (*Macaca sylvanus*)  
477 reported that males with strong social bonds had lower levels of fecal glucocorticoids [72], which  
478 is typically associated with reduced inflammation [73]. Additionally, studies in cynomolgus  
479 macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) have shown that low social status males had a higher probability  
480 of being infected with a virus than did high social status macaques [74]. These findings should be  
481 taken with caution, however, as other studies of macaques (rhesus and other species) found no  
482 differences in infection rate or immune responses between high and low status males [75-76].  
483 Although there are currently no data associating social status (or other social stressors) with CD8+  
484 T cells in rhesus macaques, there are reports in other species that CD8+ T cells can mediate the  
485 release of proinflammatory cytokines during stressful conditions [77]. Our finding of higher  
486 proportions of CD8+ T cells in low social status macaques might indicate higher levels of baseline

487 cytotoxic T cell activation, potentially affecting the CD4+ T cell response. Testing this idea will  
488 require methods such as cytokine analysis or next generation sequencing.

489

490 There was also a main effect of social status on the proportion of CD8+ T cells in females, but in  
491 contrast to males, high social status females had significantly higher proportions of this cell type  
492 compared to low social status females. One study also reported lower proportions of CD8+ T cells  
493 in low social status in non-free-ranging female rhesus macaques [34]. Given that females tend to  
494 have lower proportions of CD8+ T cells than males regardless of age [78-80], a lower proportion  
495 of this cell type in low social status females might indicate lower cytotoxic immunity at baseline.  
496 Female social status also had a main effect on the proportion of CD3-CD16+ NK cells (associated  
497 with immune surveillance, inflammation and innate responses), with low social status females  
498 having significantly higher proportions of this cell type than high social status females. Although  
499 a prior study found that the proportion of CD3-CD16+ NK cells did not vary with social status in  
500 female rhesus macaques, it did find that this cell type was the most sensitive to social status.  
501 Specifically, low social status females showed patterns of gene expression consistent with a  
502 proinflammatory phenotype in this cell type in response to lipopolysaccharide [81]. These results  
503 highlight that low status female rhesus macaque may experience higher levels of basal  
504 inflammation, consistent with other studies in this species [81-83].

505

506 In conclusion, our results demonstrate that, at the level of circulating immune cell proportions,  
507 macaques and humans show similar age-related variation in immune cell types. Although we did  
508 not detect any significant main effects of sex or sex-age interaction, it is possible that more specific,  
509 but unmeasured adaptive immune cells, such as the effector and memory subsets of B cells and T  
510 cells, could differ between males and females. In future studies, it will be important to measure  
511 other innate immune cell types, such as dendritic cells and granulocytes, since these cell types are  
512 critical for antigen presentation and the development of adaptive immune response. We found that  
513 the effects of social status differed between males and females, which is likely due to sex-  
514 differences in how rhesus macaques obtain social status. Specifically, females inherit their social  
515 status, which remains relatively stable throughout their lives, while males queue and occasionally  
516 fight to establish and maintain their social status, which may lead to stronger effects of status on  
517 immune cell distribution and function. Overall, our study provides detailed insights into the

518 impacts of social and demographic variation on immune cell status in a non-human primate model  
519 with unparalleled translatability to humans. Future research should quantify the proportions of  
520 these cell types as a function of age using a longitudinal approach, which will require sampling  
521 individuals over the course of years. Immune stimulation tests would also be informative by testing  
522 whether both the age-associated and status-associated differences in immune cell types translate  
523 to immune function.

524

### 525 **Author contributions**

526 M.R.S.R., J.P.H., L.J.N.B., C.A.S., M.J.M, M.L.P., and N.S.-M designed research; M.R.S.R.,  
527 N.M.R., M.M.W., A.D.N.-D, P.P., M.A.P.-F., E.R.S., E.B.C., J.E.N.-D., D.P., A.R.L., M.J.M. and  
528 CBRU performed research; M.R.S.R and N.S.-M. analyzed data; and M.S.R. and N.S.-M. wrote  
529 the manuscript. All authors reviewed and revised the manuscript. CBRU members: Lauren J.N.  
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533

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548

549 **Ethical note:**

550 This work was approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees of the University  
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552 The authors declare no competing interest.

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