I have 102 friends, according to Facebook. Some of those people are actual friends, people I might call on the phone, have lunch with, or engage in other friend-like behavior. Some of them are old friends I keep up with solely through their status updates. And at least one of them is a complete mystery -- I genuinely have no idea who this person is or how/if we know each other.

But we're friends!

A new study that looked at both "real" and virtual friendships concludes that, contrary to those who say computers make us more isolated, the Internet is making us all friendlier. And those who spend more time online actually have more friends, both online and off. From the paper:

> Does heavy Internet use cause more friendship, or does more friendship cause more Internet use? We suspect it is a reciprocal feedback process: Those with more friends use the Internet more to keep in contact; those with heavy Internet use develop more friendship.

Now, the authors concede that the definition of "friend" is getting stretched. But they also found that, between 2002 and 2007, the number of friendships Americans had actually grew in all categories. And 15-percent of those surveyed had "migratory friendships," that is, friends who started out as virtual but later became pals in the flesh-and-blood world.

I'm waiting for the paper about how we have more enemies now, too.

(The paper, written by Hua Wang and Barry Wellman, was published in American Behavioral Scientist and can be read here.)

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