

We have friends on Facebook and everywhere else, but are they the kind we need?

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These days, we're awash in friendship. Apps such as Facebook and Instagram allow us to keep up with third-grade pals, colleagues from old jobs and vast numbers of other people. But many "friends" on social media represent superficial connections, lacking the support and strength of closer bonds. You might be comfortable sharing photos of parties and vacations with your broader network, but you probably hesitate to post during more trying times — the breakup, the tough month at work or the death of a loved one. During hard times, you might instead turn to a few trusted friends to weather stress and sadness.

Strong friendships are a precious resource, but scientists know surprisingly little about them. In particular, it's difficult to predict what about a person makes it likely that they will attract close friends or be viewed as a close friend by others. In a [new study](#), we explored this question by mapping the ties between community members and measuring the personalities within those communities.