For the virtual friend theme, I have read Walther et al. (2008), Donath et al. (2004), and Lampe et al. (2007). All of them are dedicated to peoples’ behaviors, judgments and perception in online social networking sites, with two of them specifically focusing on social judgment and perception toward Facebook context.

Donath et al. (2004) discuss social networking display as a whole, and its characteristic functions, affordances and constraints when existing in online environment. Focusing on the connections displayed as an integrated part of individual's self-descriptive profiles, the authors analyze the psychology of establishing and managing one’s social networks within the framework of signaling theory. According to the authors, the public display of social networks online can serve as reflections of the owners’ identity and thus be facilitative, too. While some features of the online social networking display make it harder for lying about one’s identity, some other features make deception easier.

Walther et al. (2008) present a study about how several factors, i.e. the physical attractiveness, posts on the wall, and genders of one’s friends on social networking sites can affect observers’ judgment and perception of the individual. The results reveal several tendencies in observer’s social judgment in the online social networking context. For instance, friends’ physical attractiveness positively affects observers’ rating on the owner’s attractiveness, and so do others’ posts on the wall of the owner’s. However, some social conventions like “sexual double standards” seem to be continued in the social judgment in online social networking context.

Lampe et al. (2007) present another study done with Facebook. They look at the relationship between profile structure and number of friends, and try to analysis the construction of one’s profile and the participation in online community with theories like signaling theory, common ground theory and transaction cost theories. The results show that certain components in the profile correlate higher with the number of friends, for example, user status, profile field use, the types of personal information provided, etc. These results seem to imply that at least at the time of this study, Facebook was a place for people who have valid connections in physical world to extending and maintain their connections.

My friend on Facebook vs. “Facebook friend”
This has to start with my perception of a “friend”. For me, there is a lot difference between “someone I know” and “friend”. Donath et al. (2004) mention in their article that more often than not we come to know only a certain aspect of someone under specific context, which I think apply both in physical and virtual worlds. Therefore, in physical world, I have “classmates”, “school mates”, “colleagues”, while in virtual worlds I have people I connect with in WoW, in Academia and in Last.fm. However, for the one who I perceive as my “friend”, I have to know about the whole person through knowing his or her personality, communicating and interaction with them personally in the physical world. One of the reasons might be my belief that
non-verbal communication is an indispensable way for me to know others and make adequate judgment. Perhaps it is due to such “old-fashioned” principle of making friends that I have not one friend I meet and communicate purely online.

Therefore, on Facebook, consciously or not, I perceive different levels of connectedness with people in my networks. For those why are my friends, Facebook is just one of many ways we maintain and develop our friendship, given the varied difference in time and space we are having today. For the others, I tend to think them as “Facebook friends”, with whom our sense of connection is greatly mediated by the functions of Facebook. Even among these Facebook friends, I feel varied degree of connectedness, thus paying different attention. For instance, I would feel closer to high school classmates who were of the same class with me than who were my Facebook networks just because we went to the same high school.

On the other hand, lately I come to realize the possibility of knowing other people in the groups of funs I belong to. Donath et al. (2004) discuss in their article that connections can be formed around certain foci, which could be a person or theme. The function of joining certain group and claiming to be a fun can serve as helping build connections with people of the same interests. Still I would view these people as my “Facebook friend” before I know them better as a whole person.