

Alternative Instagram Memes:  
Intersectional Community and Collaborative Storytelling in the Digital Age

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## **Abstract**

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Memes are an increasingly popular medium for self-expression in a digital context. On the social media site Instagram, queer and politically-left meme creators are subverting hegemonic power dynamics to present humorous and original memes, with sincere self-representation at their core: what I designate, alternative Instagram memes. Queer people often face discrimination and social exclusion in their local communities, exacerbated by the isolating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which leads many to seek out and forge digital communities of their own. In this research-creation project, I analyze the themes and discourse present in alternative Instagram memes posted by myself and by my peers to examine how this content and the community around it forms a digital intimate public. The expansion of #deardiarymemes, an interactive meme project based on anonymous confessions, exemplifies how memes function as digital storytelling tools and is central to this research. Through a curated series of memes by myself and by my peers as well as 41 new #deardiarymemes, this work builds on existing meme scholarship using feminist theorypractice to present a previously unstudied aspect of meme culture: a subversive, leftist meme community sprouting from the social media site Instagram.

**Keywords:** memes, Instagram, intimate public, confession, digital storytelling, queer

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## Introduction

It is late April 2019 and I am feeling particularly low. A friend is over, keeping me company and laughing at my jokes. Making them laugh is the best I have felt in recent memory. At some point I look at them and say, “I think in another life I could have had a pretty good meme page.” They smile and agree. The next day I decide, why not in this life? And my meme page was born.

Increasingly popular in recent years, internet memes are “evolving tapestries of self-referential texts collectively created, circulated, and transformed by participants online” (Phillips and Milner 30). Memes may be used to share personal stories, navigate intersecting identities, make political statements (Lang), and to connect with a vast digital community in the process. Memes “made me realize that my experiences were far more universal than I’d thought,” says Meme creator @males\_r\_cancelled on the relatability of memes (Moore and Daniel). Meme giant @renaissance\_man claims that “memes are probably the most democratic artistic medium of all time” (Moore). A classic definition in the canon of meme studies would be: “(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users” (Shifman 41). For the purpose of my research, I will be focusing on alternative memes shared through the Instagram social media platform. I define *alternative Instagram memes* as non-normative and self-expressive memes using unique but interreferential styles posted to Instagram by creators who are typically in contact with other such creators. These memers may or may not utilize existing meme formats, but frequently eschew template-style memes for unique layouts, imagery, and wording. My research has built on my own meme practice and my #deardiarymemes project, a collaborative storytelling series started in 2019. Entries in this series share deeply personal stories around gender, sexuality, class, and trauma which may be difficult for some people to share in their offline social circles. The project has received over 160 entries since its launch. This work has also taken place in a time when people’s lives are increasingly online and isolated from in-person communities due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to 2017, my impression of memes was based largely off of what friends’ moms were sharing on Facebook and what my friends were looking at on the forum-style social media platform Reddit. While I have never spent much time on Reddit, its content has a way of getting around and I inevitably saw some in the form of memes. By this point, my perception of memes was dominated by Pepe the Frog (often associated with right-wing politics and white supremacy) (“Pepe the frog”), rage comics, and pictured incel-types as the creators behind these (Beauchamp). In fact, I went so far as to write my application essay for the Communications undergraduate program at Concordia University on how right-wing memes influenced the 2016 election of Trump.

In late January 2017, a friend convinces me to attend the Concordia Art History Graduate Student Association conference, No neutral art, no neutral art historians. We arrive in a university auditorium for the keynote speaker, viral meme creator Goth Shakira, and I don’t know what to expect. The next sixty or so minutes drastically changed the trajectory of my academic career. In her talk, Goth Shakira illustrated a then-new meme format. Goth Shakira went beyond the typical image macro formula of an image with Impact-font top and bottom text, instead using blocks of unformatted text over low-resolution images of primarily Latina celebrities (Shakira). These stream-of-consciousness style blocks of text detailed hyper-specific

and hyper-personal events and feelings, with the queer Latina-Canadian experience and feminism at their core, demonstrating that the hyper-personal can be hyper-relatable (Goth Shakira boasts a follower count of 42 thousand followers) (“Goth Shakira”). While she has since transitioned away from posting memes to other types of content creation (primarily fashion and beauty), Goth Shakira and other creators like her paved the way for the world of queer, leftist, feminist Instagram memes I find myself in.

Through my lived experiences as a meme creator and my academic pursuits on the subject, I am uniquely qualified to conduct this research. My Instagram meme page, @rude\_oil\_pipeline, has over 14 thousand followers, my work on memes has been published in *The Void Magazine* (Curtis, *Memes as Spectacle*) and a special edition of *ASAP/J* (Curtis, *ME(MES)*), and I have presented work in the 2021 and 2022 Concordia University Media Studies Graduate Student Conferences. My research attends to the gap in scholarship surrounding Instagram memes and their role in establishing and maintaining social ties in a predominantly queer and leftist digital community.

In the following chapters and accompanying memes, I will answer the research questions: 1) How do the memes created by myself and my peers enable the formation of a digital community while negotiating vulnerability, intersectional identities, and leftist ideology? 2) How do the Dear Diary Memes enable collective digital storytelling within an intimate public? 3) How intrinsic is the site of Instagram to this community?

## Chapter 1: Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

### Theoretical Framework:

My research is informed by the autotheoretical framework developed by Maggie Nelson in her 2015 memoir, *The Argonauts*, and refined by Lauren Fournier in her 2021 book *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*. Autotheory is the feminist practice of meshing personal anecdotes and lived experience with theory, and using each to better understand the other. In her book, Nelson recounts a period in her life characterized by her then-developing family which she effectively weaves together with feminist theory to each make better sense of the other. My research is based on my own involvement in the meme community I am studying, which I have interpreted through an intersectional Marxist-feminist and queer theorist lens. Such a lens is essential in critically understanding underlying societal power structures which marginalize certain identities, as outlined by Sara Ahmed in her book, *Living a Feminist Life*. Similarly informed by the work of Natalie Loveless in her research creation manifesto, *How to Make Art at the End of the World*, my work is that of feminist theorypractice, situating research creation practices in personal experience. I meme about my life and memeing is part of that life. In my research I have created memes both as a form of research in themselves, and as sites for further study.

My work interrogates the formation of digital intimacies and the politics of representation in daily social media use (Dobson et al.). I examine how online communities form around shared identities and affinity politics (Haraway) within “liberated zones:” online spaces wherein marginalized identities can be explored and celebrated (Berne). This research is necessary now because of the shift from in-person to online forms of communicating, socializing, and working resultant from the COVID-19 pandemic. I am uniquely positioned to conduct this work through my deep ties to the community of queer, leftist meme creators I am embedded in, which has served as the site for my research and creation. I have drawn from the canon of meme studies to understand the ways in which memes function broadly: through “collective creation, circulation, and transformation [as] multimodal texts that facilitate participation by reappropriation” (Milner 14). Feminist theories of public intimacy, marginalization, and self-representation as well as platform studies, which I will discuss in the following section, serve to elucidate the specific function of memes in my community of study.

### Methodological Framework:

This work was primarily conducted during the 2021-2023 academic years using the mixed methodologies of thematic analysis, discourse analysis, Instagrammatics, interviews, and meme-creation-as-research. As defined by Chapman and Sawchuk, “creation-as-research” involves the elaboration of projects where creation is required in order for research to emerge” (19). The continuation and expansion of the #deardiarymemes project was necessary in order to study it as a digital storytelling tool through its participatory framework, which works towards the co-creation of intimate digital worlds. By conducting my research through original meme creation, my work has employed an autoethnographic and ethnographic study of the community I am embedded in. Through memes, my findings are rendered accessible to the community they emerge from. The memes created for this project feature eye-catching or familiar images paired

with excerpts from my research findings such as entries in the #deardiarymemes, personal anecdotes, and several curated memes made by my peers.

### **Creation:**

The process of creating a post for the #deardiarymemes series begins with reviewing anonymous submissions made through a Google Form, accessible through my Instagram page (Instagram allows pages to include one to two links on their profile). I lightly edit or select excerpts from a submission before scouring the web for appropriate imagery to pair them with. When selecting imagery for a meme, I usually look for a character that shares traits expressed in the submission (such as a trans cartoon character for a post about trans identity), or whose energy matches its affect (such as an image of Lisa Simpson freaking out for a post about some form of anxiety). I attempt not to censor the submissions I receive, but I will occasionally employ an intentional misspelling or replace a letter with an asterisk when using certain terms that are more likely to be reported on Instagram.

Social media polices “appropriate” expressions of gender, sexuality, and race (Marwick 2015). Memes work to subvert this *picture-perfect* narrative. However, memes are also bound by Instagram’s algorithm and censorship, and are diluted amongst the site’s advertising and promotional content. These hegemonic tools work to privilege the visibility of some identities and experiences over others, in a way that mirrors society at large. While my own experience within the meme community is central to my work, there are intersections of race, class, and sex worker-status that I cannot personally speak to as a white, raised-middle class, individual not engaged in sex work. These aspects of my identity align with hegemonic structures while my queerness and transness clash with its norms. In order to address counterhegemonic identities I do not hold, I have included a curated selection of memes made by creators in my Instagram meme community who identify with them and speak to my research questions.

### **Data Collection:**

In their text “Instagrammatics and digital methods: studying visual social media, from selfies and GIFs to memes and emoji,” media researchers Tim Highfield and Tama Leaver address the need for robust research into visual (and mixed visual-textual) social media. They provide an outline of Instagrammatics, methods for studying Instagram content under the umbrella of platform studies, and address several methodological concerns for the visual media researcher. One such concern is that “the methodological challenge here involves the study of visual content when scraping and storing said content goes against a platform’s own policies” (Highfield and Leaver 50); while scraping the data from my Instagram posts is a method available to me, I opted only to use screenshots, field notes, and the data available to me through my Instagram insights, such as numbers of likes, saves, and shares, in order to avoid any potential legal repercussions of using scraped data. They also raise the methodological concern of temporality when working with social media content which may disappear at any moment, whether removed by the poster or by the site itself (Highfield and Leaver 55). In order to preserve my content against the possibility of its removal, I keep all of my own content backed up on a hard drive in addition to posting it to Instagram. In order to record the Instagrammatics and comments associated with my #deardiarymemes posts, I have transcribed every comment as

well as the number of likes, saves, and shares on each post made up until December 21, 2023 in a spreadsheet.

I looked to the model provided by Taina Bucher in her research for how to ethically reshare people's social media comments. In her research on the algorithmic imaginary, Bucher collected tweets referring to the algorithm, reached out to the authors of the tweets, and "slightly altered [the exact wording of the tweets] in order to ensure the privacy of the participants" (33-34). Given that I am examining interactions with posts made by me on my publicly-visible Instagram page, and due to considerations of scale and feasibility, I opted not to reach out to commenters, and have cited comments within their original context: on the Instagram posts. Through posts and stories, I made it known to my followers before beginning my research that I am studying the interactions on my page, with my posts (memes), and with me. I reopened the #deardiarymemes submission form with a statement of informed consent regarding my research goals and did not include any submissions received prior to this in my research. I received over 60 responses and remediated the first 41 into memes which I then posted to my Instagram page. There, I was able to observe them for user interactions, comments, and collaboratively unfolding digital storytelling. I must note that as an active participant in the community I have studied, I occasionally contributed to the comments and stories unfolding therein.

I elected to conduct seven interviews with fellow meme creators, meme consumers, and meme scholars, found through a call out made on my Instagram story. I chose interviews for one of my research methods because of my focus on collectivity and communal storytelling. My interview participants were provided with a written consent form (see Appendix A) prior to their participation and provided the option to participants of remaining confidential or to have their name and/or Instagram username included in my research findings. Interviews were conducted over telephone, email, and Zoom call, which I recorded and later transcribed.

In accordance with their deep entanglements with the Instagram platform, I have elected to present the #deardiarymemes created as (and for) research for this thesis on Instagram. As I will discuss in the following chapters, I believe that Instagram as a site is essential to the collective digital storytelling that unfolds through the posts in the #deardiarymemes series. Viewing them in isolation without the comments of others, the ability to comment yourself and to easily share a post to a friend or your story, would not portray the full stories told through the series. The #deardiarymemes can be found throughout my 1000 plus posts or by searching the hashtag on Instagram. There is also a curated story highlight on my Instagram page of all 41 #deardiarymemes that is visible to people signed into an Instagram account. Those signed into Instagram can also engage with the posts by liking, saving, sharing, and commenting on them. I have determined that this is the most ethical way to invite people to engage with the work I have created (with the help of my alternative Instagram meme community). In order to archive the posts and comments, and to render them accessible to my thesis comity, I have also saved screenshots of every post and comment from the 41 #deardiarymemes posts (taken on February 28, 2024) (see appendix B).

### **Data Analysis:**

Through thematic and discourse analyses as well as Instagrammatics, my work examines memetic media as an example of vernacular creativity and digital storytelling that enables self-representation of personal stories typically marginalized or erased by mainstream media. In the chapters to follow I conduct visual discourse and thematic analyses of the communal stories told

through the #deardiarymemes posts and comments made on them, as recorded in the aforementioned spreadsheet, and analyze how these posts and comments work in conjunction to form a digital intimate public. Using this record, I analyze the key themes of the posts and comments made on them, which I will discuss in detail in chapter three.

Gillian Rose outlines Foucauldian discourse analysis in her second chapter of the book *Visual Methodologies*. Discourse analysis considers visual and textual materials and is “concerned with their production by, and their reiteration of, particular institutions and their practices, and their production of particular human subjects” (Rose 220). For my research purposes I have employed discourse analysis in order to examine the democratic quality of memetic media and how the #deardiarymemes project and the confessions and conversations it enables subvert typical Western media power structures. I examine how meme creators and consumers employ shared vernacular and style beyond meme formats to cultivate a sense of belonging and mutual understanding.

Irit Rogoff provides a robust introduction to the field of visual culture in her chapter of *The Visual Culture Reader*. Rogoff states that visual culture is central to “producing meanings, establishing and maintaining aesthetic values, gender stereotypes [among others] and power relations within culture” (14). Referencing Trinh T. Min-ha, Rogoff suggests that “in claiming and retelling the narratives [of the texts we engage with] ('speaking to'), we alter the very structures by which we organize and inhabit culture” (18). Rogoff therefore reinforces the usefulness of Foucauldian discourse analysis in understanding the meanings and power relations of a set of texts (in this case, memes). By entering into conversation with the content of my research, which is itself already in conversation, I demonstrate the power of collaborative memetic media to subvert power systems and reshape (visual) culture in the chapters to come.

## Chapter 2: Alternative Instagram and Putting the ‘Me’ in Meme

In this chapter I will respond to the research question: 1) How do the memes created by myself and my peers enable the formation of a digital community while negotiating queer identity and leftist ideology? I do so through an analysis of alternative Instagram meme culture and the creative community I am embedded in (see fig. 1). This section is accompanied by a series of memes that have informed and explored my research findings.

If the personal is political (Hamisch), then so too are alternative Instagram memes. Memes merge discourse, theory, and the personal in a highly public format: Instagram posts. While some memers set their pages to private which allows only approved followers to see their posts, the vast majority of memers in my community have public pages. In digital spaces like Instagram, community exists through “relationship[s] of commonality” (James 319). Like minded people, namely queer and trans folks who hold leftist politics and have a penchant for sharing anti-capitalist sentiments, seem to find each other through the creation and sharing of memes on Instagram. Instagram users like Emiliano Papagna, one of my interview subjects, “engage in memes that share [existential or political] experiences or aspects of life because that’s where [they] feel [they] have something potentially meaningful to say. In this sense the feeling of belonging to a community comes from similar experiences that we all share, despite geographical, age and cultural barriers.” Using Instagram requires a smartphone or laptop and internet access, which are relatively low barriers to access when 84% of Canadians own a smartphone (“So long landline, hello smartphone”) and 94% have home internet (“Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2022”). While a meme posted to a public Instagram page might be seen by anyone on the platform, these pages amass dedicated followers. In clicking follow, there is an intention set on seeing future content by that creator.

Whether it’s your pants falling down while shopping for candles (see fig. 2) or a funny childhood event rooted in parental neglect, memes offer me and many like me a uniquely comical, personal, and accessible format through which to tell these stories. In creating memes, “I borrow culturally-familiar imagery such as cartoon characters (Lisa Simpson is a personal favourite), removing them from their original context, and pairing them with personal anecdotes, jokes about my life, and expressions of my political stance” (Curtis). Memeing is both silly and serious; it is a form of group therapy or “interactive trauma diaries” centered on the act of sharing (Eloise). Before beginning talk therapy in earnest, I began sharing my deepest thoughts, experiences, hopes, and fears through memes (see fig. 3). In a way, this primed me for the vulnerable journey of starting individual therapy in my mid twenties. I have long been a very private person. Topics like my mental health, sexuality, and gender were surrounded by shame ingrained through my rural-Ontario upbringing and emotionally-repressed parents (see fig. 4). The semi-anonymity of my meme page emboldened me to begin sharing thoughts and experiences I previously kept private, often from even my closest friends. What began as a way to vent to no one and anyone quickly morphed into a highly intentional practice in relating to others.

Memes can be used to come out—memes were the first place I started to talk about my gender (see fig. 5), to critique hegemonic systems like capitalism and the police state (see figs. 6-9), to explore racial identity and address anti-Black racism (see fig. 10), and to speak to and connect with others with less visible or socially and politically threatened identities like trans-femme sex workers (see fig. 11). They can be beautiful or ugly, funny or serious, or all of these



at once. Meme creators “develop unique styles while also feeding into each other’s aesthetics, often collaborating through group chats” (Curtis).

In the early years of my meme page (2019-2020), Instagram group chats were abundant. Memers with similar aesthetics, ideologies, and identities would jump into group chats where any number of topics might be broached. I have been added to group chats formed for the sake of forging interpersonal connections and friendships, and chats with more specific goals like the #queermemecoalition and #startrekantifascists, wherein members would vote on weekly topics to post about, and tag each other on roll-call slides to help grow our overlapping audiences. Instagram tags link to a user’s page and help to direct potential followers to pages they may like for its political and thematic similarities to the page(s) they already follow.

Many of the group chats I was once in have since dissolved, but I remain in regular contact with some of the first memers I befriended on Instagram and continue to forge new connections as new pages pop up. There is a sense of solidarity amongst memers that often manifests in more established pages promoting newer pages to their audiences by sharing their memes to their stories. My follower base jumped from something like 50 to 500 people in a matter of hours after larger pages like @renaissance\_man and @not.yr.boyfriend shared some of my early memes with captions like, “go follow @rude\_oil\_pipeline right now!” I am always especially excited to discover a new meme page run by another trans person and share it with my audience.

By making queer content “more visible and accessible, the internet has also made it easier for different parts of the [queer] community to know one another—and to explore differences that might be explosive (or unexplored) in offline communities” (Samuel). Online communities, understood as “any virtual social space where people come together to get and give information or support, to learn or to find company” (Preece 348), can help fill the absence of in-person community many queer people feel. Growing up in a rural environment, I had essentially no queer representation in my local spheres. The community of memers I am part of on Instagram has helped to fill that void. When polled, 86% of my followers (which includes other memers) self-identified as queer and 38% self-identified as trans. As we entered the pandemic and in-person community became scarce and even dangerous, online communities became particularly vital in bringing queer people together regardless of physical proximity. This is increasingly true for trans people as lawmakers and anti-trans organizations work to make public spaces less safe for them to exist in.

Having been the first person in my friend group to undergo gender-affirming top surgery in November 2022, I found it natural to turn to my online community for support and advice. Complete strangers reached out with well wishes, personal experiences, and invaluable advice without which I cannot imagine how I would have been ready for such a life-changing procedure. I also cannot imagine how I would have connected with these people had it not been for memes. By negotiating our queer identities and experiences through the creation and sharing of memes, my peers and I have formed a digital community. In turn, I was able to offer much of the advice I received from my Instagram community to friends in both my online and local spheres who have since undergone the same surgery. This inter-communal information sharing has had tangible impacts on the wellbeing of myself and of my peers. To me, this exemplifies how “virtual interactions supplement rather than substitute for the ‘real,’ and stimulate more real interaction, as opposed to isolation and desolation” (Rogers 20).

It was not long after starting my meme page in the spring of 2019 that I recognized the value memeing and the meme community were bringing to my life. I began to imagine ways I

could invite others into my meme practice who might not want to create a meme page of their own. From this desire, I conceptualized and launched the #deardiarymemes project, which I will discuss in chapter three.



Figure 1 A meme by @sexters\_laboratory featuring a photo of a desk and office chair set up with a computer monitor in a desert. Text reads, “microdosing intimacy by oversharing with my mutuals online.”

**TFW YOUR PANTS FALL DOWN WHILE  
CANDLE SHOPPING SO YOU QUICKLY  
PULL THEM BACK UP AND EXIT THE  
STORE WITHOUT MAKING EYE CONTACT  
OR PURCHASING ANY CANDLES**

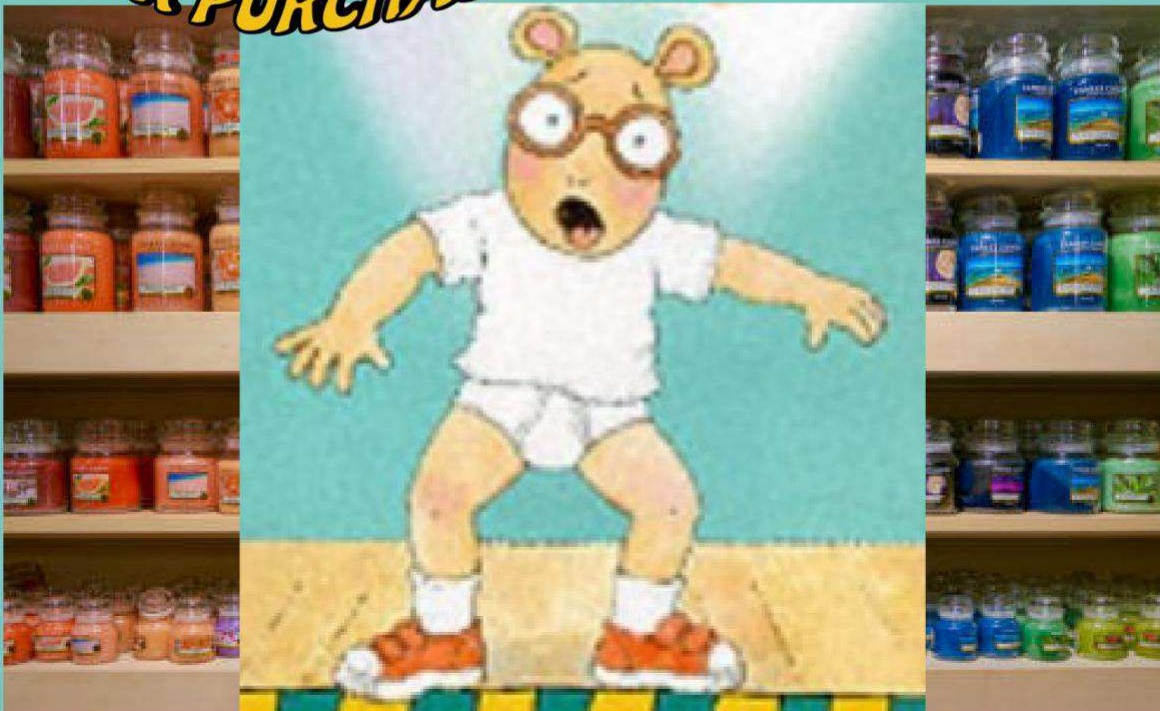


Figure 2 An original meme by the author, featuring an image of Arthur the Aardvark in only his underwear, shoes, and a t-shirt looking shocked and embarrassed, superimposed over a photo of shelves full of Yankee Candles. Text reads, “TFW your pants fall down while candle shopping so you quickly pull them back up and exit the store without making eye contact or purchasing any candles.”





canada.gov.ca

What Goes Around Comes Around

Following



therapy is expensive



whispering 'way she goes' is free

Figure 3 A meme by @canada.gov.ca featuring a closeup photo of a white, red-headed man with facial hair tipping a brown cowboy hat. Text reads, "Therapy is expensive, whispering 'way she goes' is free."



Figure 4 An original meme by the author, featuring a black-outline drawing of Francine from Arthur smiling and pointing at the text with a large pointer. Text reads, “Maybe I can’t blame anyone but myself parents.”

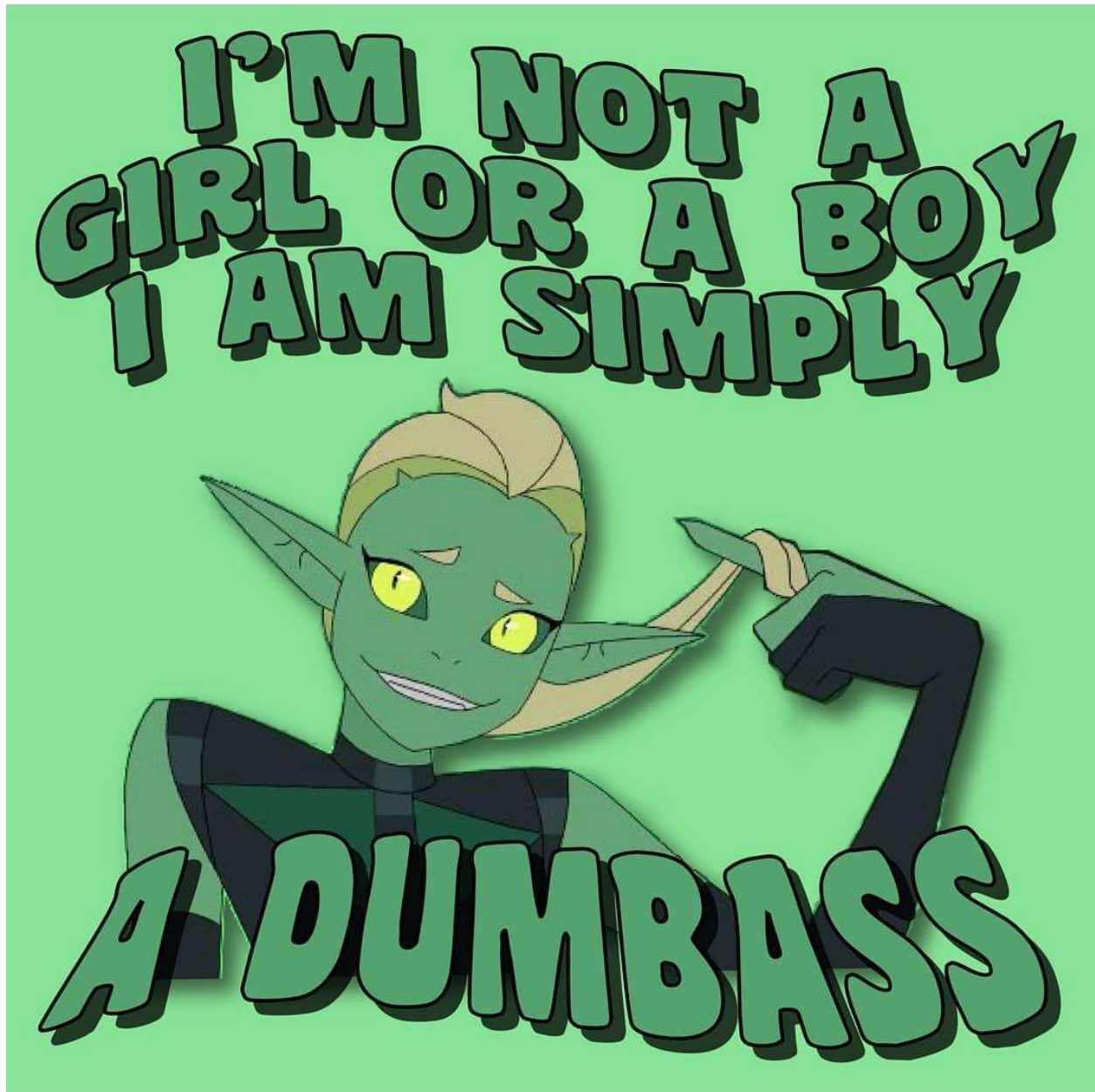


Figure 5 An original meme by the author, featuring an image of Double trouble, a green lizard-like humanoid from the cartoon She-Ra and the Princesses of Power, twirling their hair and smiling coyly. Text reads, "I'm not a girl or a boy, I am simply a dumbass."





Figure 6 An original meme by the author, featuring collaged images of Cookie Monster, Gonzo, and Grover from Sesame Street and the Muppets. Text reads, "The only blue lives that matter."



Figure 7 An original meme by the author, featuring an image of two Bratz dolls carrying shopping bags and standing outside of a storefront. Text reads, “Participating in capitalism is making me feel bad, maybe participating in capitalism will make me feel better.”





**eyerollsandbloodlust**  
Redlands, California

Following



Figure 8 A meme by @eyerollsandbloodlust featuring the “[girl putting tuba on girl’s head](#)” meme format. The girl holding the tuba is labeled as “me” while the girl with the tuba on her head is labeled as “my local community.” Text over the tuba reads, “Stop valorizing small business owners. They too, are classist exploiters of workers and are more likely to get away with abuse and wage theft. The ma and pa shop owner myth is benefiting and enriching the owning class right wingers of your community.”

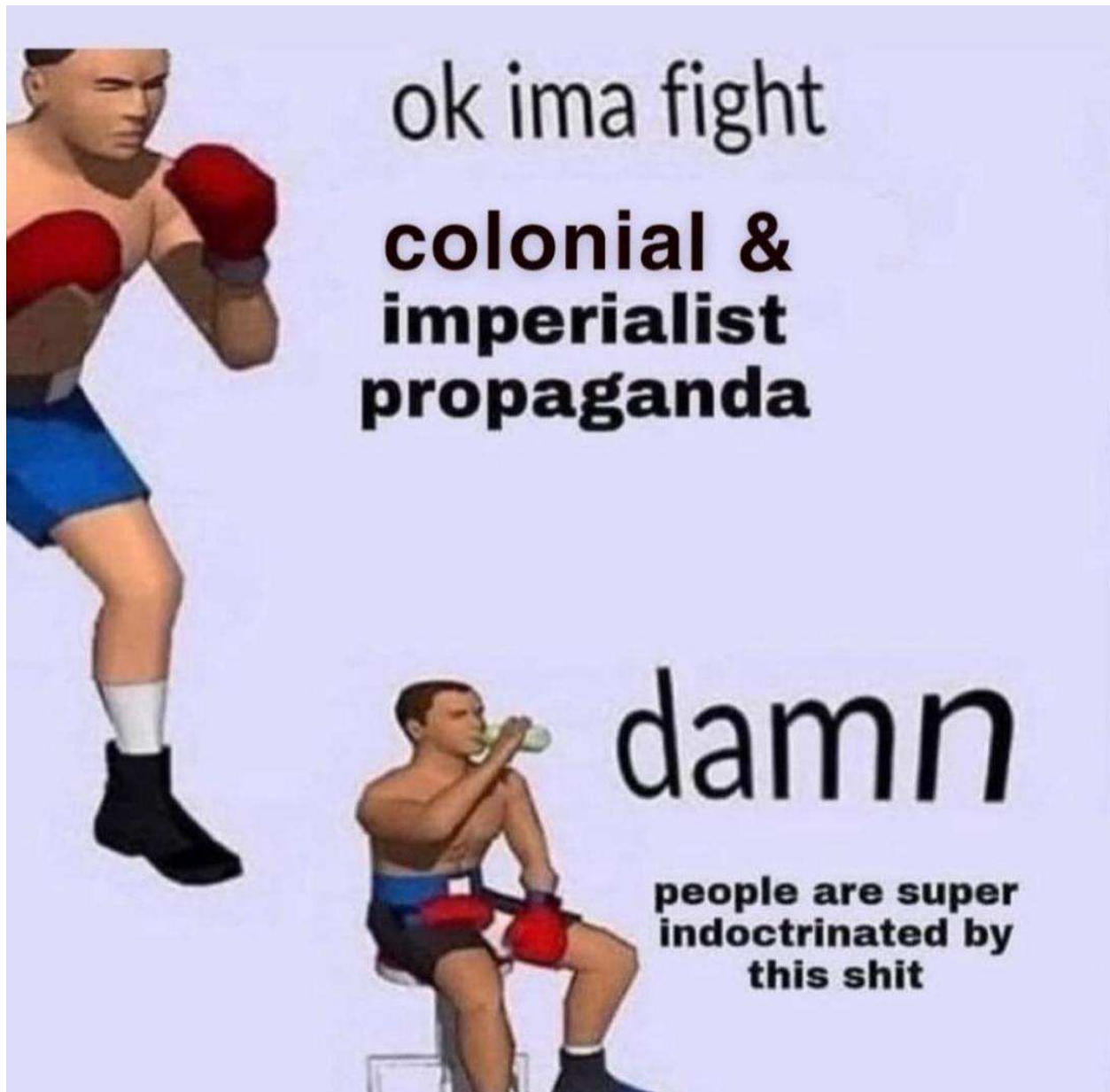


Figure 9 A meme by @eyerollsandbloodlust featuring the boxer [“ok ima fight”](#) meme format. Text reads, “ok ima fight colonial and imperialist propaganda. damn people are super indoctrinated by this shit.”



trying very hard to reach your goals, make new friends, and tend to your mental health when it hits you that you're a black woman and most of the reason why you're so hard on yourself is to prove to others that you're capable and because the fact that you're less likely to get adequate health care, have job offers, and even get married scare you to death but you try not to let the feeling of dread overwhelm you and try to feel grateful for being a relatively privileged black individual in America although you're not even supposed to exist since your family was stolen from Africa so while dealing with the guilt of not doing enough even though you actually are you then beat yourself up for not being over slavery although the effects of it is causing you real distress and probably will plague the black community for generations to come



Figure 10 A meme by @blackgirlsareg0d featuring screenshot of Black actress Gabrielle Union looking distressed with text that reads, “Trying very hard to reach your goals, make new friends, and tend to your mental health when it hits you that you’re a black woman and most of the reason why you’re so hard on yourself is to prove to others that you’re capable and because the fact that you’re less likely to get adequate health care, have job offers, and even get married scare you to death but you try not to let the feeling of dread overwhelm you and try to feel grateful for being a relatively privileged black individual in American although you’re not even supposed to exist since your family was stolen from Africa so while dealing with the guilt of not doing enough even though you actually are you then beat yourself up for not being over slavery although the effects of it is causing you real distress and probably will plague the black community for generations to come.”



Figure 11 Meme by @gaymemescheap featuring an image of the Sanrio character My Melody smiling and holding up a cup of tea. Text reads, "As a le\$bean Sworker I even hate the "good" clients." Here 'le\$bean' is used in place of the correct spelling 'lesbian' to circumvent Instagram's censorship around LGBTQ+ content. The term 'Sworker' is a shorthand for 'sex worker.'

### Chapter 3: “Dear Diary Memes”: An Intimate Public

In this chapter I will respond to the research question: 2) How do the Dear Diary Memes enable collective digital storytelling within an intimate public? I do so through a discourse analysis of the themes present in the #deardiarymemes project posts and their comments sections. This section will be accompanied by a curated selection of memes from the #deardiarymemes series that best exemplify my findings around the project.

Have you ever come across something posted online, perhaps a meme, and thought, “I didn’t know anyone else felt like this”? I aim to show that this phenomenon is more common than you might think, and carries real implications for our digital social world. In my research I have built on an ongoing project called #deardiarymemes in which I remediate anonymous diary-style submissions into memes then posted to my Instagram meme page, @rude\_oil\_pipeline. Remediation is the refashioning of older forms of media, such as the diary entry, into new forms of visual media, in this case the meme (Bolter and Grusin). Once posted to my page “total strangers can relate to something hyper-specific and deeply personal, continuing the story by sharing, reposting, or commenting on a meme” (Curtis, *ME(MES)*). These comments exist as part of a broader discourse surrounding anonymity, online confession, and communal digital storytelling through the affordances of memetic media “for new or innovative narrative forms” (Burgess 207). If some “stories should never end, but rather lead to further stories” (Tsing 287), I propose that memes are doing just that. Meme theorist R. M. Milner says of memes: “Internet memes depend on collective creation, circulation, and transformation. They’re multimodal texts that facilitate participation by reappropriation, by balancing a fixed premise with novel expression” (Milner 14). Memes “take on new and augmented meanings” (Curtis, *ME(MES)*) as they circulate through inboxes and stories and spark the conception of new memes born into an ever-evolving communal digital story.

With the #deardiarymemes project I sought to extend the freedom of expression I feel my meme page allows me to others who may not wish to share such thoughts and stories attached to their own name or social media presence. These stories are often deeply personal. While the project has been ongoing since 2019, I relaunched my submissions page in 2022 with an accompanying ethics statement for the express purpose of study for this thesis (see fig. 12).

From the subsequent submissions received, I made 41 posts. Over the course of the project I have endeavored to remediate every submission into memes chronologically from the date it was received. After reviewing the comments on each post and transcribing them into a spreadsheet, I conducted an Instagrammatics analysis of the number of likes, saves, and shares the posts received, as well as a visual discourse analysis of the primary themes represented in the memes and the comments left on them. Across these 41 posts, they received an average of 315 likes, 27 shares, 38 saves, 5 comments, and one reply, with the highest number of likes on a single post amounting to 747 and the highest number of comments totalled 23. Of these 41 posts, 30 received at least one comment. Out of a total of 189 comments across the 41 posts, 125 were made by unique commenters while the remainder were made by repeat commenters. This reveals ongoing engagement by individuals, who I would term community members, with both my meme page and the #deardiarymemes project. Every post was liked, saved, and shared by at least one person. These numbers help to demonstrate the popularity of this meme series and illuminates the relatability of the content featured therein.

While these memes do not conform to pre-existing formats, they utilize fun and familiar imagery such as stills from cartoons like *The Simpsons* along with bold and eye-catching fonts to



signal that they are in fact memes. Choices of phrasing and text layout are also used to tap into meme discourse, such as a top text-bottom text layout (see fig. 13). By iterating on themes and elements associated with memes, I am able to expand the category of meme to include the unique content of the #deardiarymemes.

The primary themes represented in these 41 posts are intimate confessions regarding mental health (see fig. 14), struggles with interpersonal relationships (dating, friendship, and family) (see fig. 15), gender and transition (see fig. 16), and issues of class and capitalism. Above all, what ties these posts together are the accounts of trauma, insecurity, and confusion stemming from the varying topics explored, along with a sense that those behind the submissions lacked an alternative outlet for the thoughts and stories shared (with many submissions stating explicitly that no one else knows the information being shared). Once posted on Instagram, many of these memes receive comments.

The primary themes present in the comments left across the 41 posts in this series that I am examining are compassion, offered in the form of well wishes, empathy, and advice; and relatability and self-identification. People will offer their compassion by commenting pieces of advice, encouragement, and well wishes in the hopes that the person behind the words, or anyone going through something similar, will see it and feel less alone. Others who identify with a meme will comment that they feel or have felt the same way, sometimes going into detail about their own similar experiences and empathizing with the person behind the submission. In doing so, they are also continuing the story told through the meme in their comments. In their comments, people will employ the vernacular of the meme community to signal their own understanding of and inclusion in that community. This use of vernacular “describe[s] and illuminate[s] creative practices that form highly particular and non-elite social contexts and communicative conventions” (Burgess 206). Common phrases such as “mood,” “I’m in this picture,” “felt,” and “real” appear frequently in the comments people leave, and in discourse on Instagram in general. (see appendix).

It is important to note that the privacy settings on my Instagram page only allow for users who either follow or are followed by me can comment on my posts. This helps to explain the lack of negative comments. By pressing follow, one joins a publicly-visible list of people connected through their shared affinity for a meme page and its politics and aesthetics, constituting a digital intimate public. Only people who have made the conscious decision to follow me, and thus likely resonate with the content of my posts, can participate in these conversations and contribute to these stories.

Both my followers and fellow meme creators have reached out to me by direct message to ask about my wellbeing after posting in the series. Once, a fellow memer invited me to join a remote Alcoholics Anonymous group for trans people in recovery after assuming the post was speaking to my own experience (see fig. 15). I endeavor to make it clear which posts on my page come from #deardiarymemes submissions by always including the phrase “dear diary” in the post itself and the hashtag #deardiarymemes in the caption, but occasionally people will miss these cues and interact with the post as if it is my own words. The inclusion of the phrase “dear diary” also works to conjure the intimacy involved in sharing thoughts typically reserved for one’s private diary or journal. Many people have become familiar with the project, however, and will leave comments intended for the person behind the submission should they see it: “Hang on friendo ❤️. I may just be a stranger on the internet, but I believe in you” (Curtis #deardiarymemes entry 11). Others will comment their own story, underlining the relatability of even some of the most specific experiences shared. In response to a post expressing the trauma

involved in growing up in poverty, one Instagram user commented: “Ugh same :( I’ve been trying to find joy in things outside of consumerism and it helps relieve the existential financial dread a bit,” (Curtis #deardiarymemes entry 28) (see fig. 17). Others have commented simply to express their appreciation for the project: “this series is the realest thing on ig rn” (Curtis #deardiarymemes entry 38).

In her article “Intimate Economies: PostSecret and the Affect of Confession”, Anna Poletti employs cultural theorist Lauren Berlant’s concept of the intimate public sphere to argue that the circulation of personal stories works to produce a public that is bound by the feeling of shared experience (26, 29). Through the creation and sharing of memes, and the comments made on them, so too does the feeling of shared experience work to bind people together in a digital intimate public. Poletti claims that “the internet has brought the catharsis of disclosure to the masses, but with the safety net of anonymity” (Mohammed) (see fig. 18). By confessing to a community, Poletti argues, “The knowledge-power formation of confession mapped by Foucault... where subjects confessed to an individual who had the power to heal them by hearing the truth, has undergone a kind of democratization” (Poletti qtd. in Mohammed) (see fig. 19). Functioning beyond giving us something to laugh at, “memes also help build shared experiences, reduce stress, and initiate collective coping in a nonthreatening manner” (Bauer and Ngondo 47-48). The intimate public interacting with the #deardiarymemes project engage in a form of mutual absolution by telling each other through likes and comments that their struggles are shared and understood, and perhaps telling themselves at the same time.

Similar to making a confession in a religious setting, there is a clear sense in the submissions I receive of *getting something off one's chest*. True to the intention behind the project, people are sharing thoughts and experiences they otherwise may be unable to share. Remediating the submissions into memes involves a degree of curation. The submissions I receive range from a single sentence to several paragraphs of deep divulgence, detailing intensely personal and often traumatic events. I use the submissions either as-written or edit them with the intention of retaining the themes and tone in the original writing. Navigating how much detail to include from submissions in the corresponding memes I create and when or whether to use content warnings, raised questions of censorship and other limitations of the Instagram platform. In the third chapter, I will discuss my findings on the potential for my meme community to exist outside of Instagram.

# #Deardiarymemes

Dear Diary, I do not always find it easy to tell others how I feel. I need creative ways to express myself and to work through the things I cannot speak out loud. The meme format - text on graphic - has provided a new and unparalleled outlet for me to share my innermost thoughts and fears. By pouring out my heart onto the internet, I have shared parts of myself I never thought I could, and connected with others in the process. I am witnessing continually the need we have to hear and be heard, to be reminded that we are not alone and that many of our experiences are deeply relatable to both those around us and people we may never have a chance to meet.

Now, I invite you to take part in this process with me by making an anonymous entry into my diary. Some of your words may inspire memes. All of your words will contribute to a collective experience of letting go, of being heard without having to speak. Check [@rude\\_oil\\_pipeline](#) and [#deardiarymemes](#) on Instagram regularly for new entries into my meme diary. <3

**ETHICS STATEMENT:** The memes created through this project will be a source of study for my research-creation thesis at Concordia University. While no entries will be shared, the memes and related findings (comments, shares, and other interactions on the Instagram platform) will be made public in my thesis work upon completion and publication. I acknowledge the financial support of the FRQSC for this project.

Fig 12 screenshot of the #deardiarymemes submission page.



**Dear diary,**



**I don't feel trans.  
I don't feel like a woman.  
Where does that leave me?**

Figure 13 #deardiarymemes entry 6, featuring an image of Lisa Simpson holding up a Malibu Barbie doll and looking furious and confused. Text reads, "I don't feel trans. I don't feel like a woman. Where does that leave me?"

## *deardiary*

**I don't feel like I can go  
out on a date. I can't live  
or spend a lot of time  
with someone without  
starting to hate them.  
I can't listen, and I can't  
share my real feelings.  
I just can't do any of it**

Figure 14 #dearidarymemes entry 19, slide three, featuring wavy text on a light purple background that reads, “Dear Diary, I don’t feel like I can go out on a date. I can’t live or spend a lot of time with someone without starting to hate them. I can’t listen, and I can’t share my real feelings. I just can’t do any of it.”



**Dear Diary,**

**I am beautiful. Loved.**

**And I still have no desire to  
have children.**

**I am surrounded by poverty.**

**I don't have clean drinking water in  
my community and I am a loner here.**

**Intergenerational trauma has  
impacted some more severely  
than others. I am fortunate not to be  
a drug addict, alcoholic, or criminal  
like so many in my community.**

Figure 15 #deardiarymemes entry 35, slide two, featuring bold blue text over a darker blue background that reads, “Dear Diary, I am beautiful. Loved. And I still have no desire to have children. I am surrounded by poverty. I don’t have clean drinking water in my community and I am a loner here. Intergenerational trauma has impacted some more severely than others. I am fortunate not to be a drug addict, alcoholic, or criminal like so many in my community.”

## Dear Diary,

**I know I will likely be on psych meds for the rest of my life, but I fear I will never get off the super-high-dose-short-half-life-horrible-brain-zappy-withdrawal medication I'm currently on. And I fear that I will relapse/compromise my sobriety if I try to taper off this med.**



Figure 16 #deardiarymems entry 11, side one, featuring an image of Usagi (Sailor Moon in human form) lying on her bed half curled up, facing away from the viewer. Text reads, “Dear Diary, I know I will likely be on psych meds for the rest of my life, but I fear I will never get off the super-high-dose-short-half-life- horrible-brain-zappy-withdrawal medication I’m currently on. And I fear that I will relapse/compromise my sobriety if I try to taper off this med.”



dear diary,  
I grew up poor and just now realize  
how much of a trauma this was.  
I still don't feel like I deserve a lot of things.



Figure 17 #deardiarymemes entry 28, slide one, featuring an image of Nelson Muntz from the Simpsons frowning while looking at an imaginary reflection of himself, in which he's dressed in a tux and top hat and grinning. Text reads, "dear diary, I grew up poor and just now realize how much of a trauma this was. I still don't feel like I deserve a lot of things."

**Dear Diary,**

**I recently entered a relationship. I gave myself a few years to try and heal after a very abusive relationship, but I can tell that I'm still insecure and anxious. I am tired of those feelings taking over when I should be experiencing puppy love.**



Figure 18 #deardiarymemes entry 38, featuring an image of an anime girl looking lost in thought, holding a puppy dog to her chest. Text reads, "Dear Diary, I recently entered a relationship. I gave myself a few years to try and heal after a very abusive relationship, but I can tell that I'm still insecure and anxious. I am tired of those feelings taking over when I should be experiencing puppy love."





Figure 19 A meme by @yung\_nihilist featuring an image of a white woman dressed as a nun, pulling open the front of her robe and smiling down at her large breasts. Text reads, "Posting not as compulsive oversharing but as an act of penitence before God."



Figure 20 A meme by @sexters\_laboratory featuring a screenshot of the Mean Girls “get in loser, we’re going shopping” scene, with the text, “get online loser, we’re unpacking our collective trauma.”



## **Chapter 4: Out-stagram: A new site for alternative meme culture and community?**

In this chapter, I respond to the research question: 3) How might this work function differently off Instagram when the flow is diverted onto a new website? What I have found, however, is that it does not, as I will discuss later in this chapter. I envisioned this theoretical new website as featuring two primary sections: (1) #deardiarymemes, and (2) curated content produced about and through the research process by me and my meme community, as well as a link to the #deardiarymemes submission page. Through my research process and my interviews in particular, it became clear that even with the censorship and hostility present (see fig. 21), this community is unique to Instagram and would inevitably lose something of its essence in its reproduction (Benjamin) or transition to a new (digital) space: my proposed website. In light of this, I have worked to answer the question: How intrinsic is the site of Instagram to this community?

My interview subjects, all heavily engaged with memes either as creators or consumers, unanimously claimed Instagram as their platform of choice for engaging with memes. Of course were I to have sourced my interview subjects from Facebook or Reddit, the results might have reflected that, but my research points to several reasons behind Instagram's popularity for sharing original queer and leftist memes. Reddit carries strong associations with misogyny and other forms of oppressive thinking (Massanari). Meanwhile, Facebook seems to have fallen out of favour with younger users (Millennials and Gen Z). Through my interviews I saw a strong association between Facebook and boomers (a term often used to describe both actual members of the baby boomer generation and people demonstrating ignorant or conservative thinking often associated with ageing) ("Boomer"). My own occasional visits to the site are often greeted by a particular genre of meme popular amongst white, middle-class, middle-aged moms (Douglas)—some of whom I happen to be Facebook friends with. Tumblr and X are additional social media sites some people use to share and consume memes, however both fall far outside of my own social media use and primary demographics. Tumblr is primarily associated with teen internet use (McCracken) while X is popular amongst high-earning academics (Wojcik and Hughes) and is better suited for sharing text than images.

### **Instagram:**

According to a 2015 Huffpost article, "If you want to know where to find millennials on social media, it is without doubt on Instagram" (Cowling). The Instagram insights for my page breaks down my follower base as 58.7% aged 25-34, with 22.9% aged 18-24, 14.2% aged 35-44, and the remaining 2% made up of users aged 13-17 and 55-plus. This supports the evaluation of my interviewees and my own observations that the primary age group of alternative Instagram memes is millennials and gen-Zers. According to Heather Dretsch, an Assistant Professor of Marketing at NC State University's Poole College of Management, "90% [of gen-Zers] use Instagram daily," meanwhile "only 41% use Facebook, though less frequently [than Instagram]" (Dretsch). Dretsch claims that users "seem to value their Instagram time more [than other social media] because it informs them and is more personal." Given that Instagram's initial purpose was photo sharing, this too makes it an obvious choice for posting and consuming memes. Instagram users may choose between a public and private page: one viewable to anyone and the other viewable only to approved followers. By following a page, you are essentially subscribing to see their posted content in your feed, and their story in the story bar. Similarly, by allowing

someone to follow your page, they will find your content on their Instagram. Instagram allows four basic interactions with posts: liking, saving (to private or shared folders for later viewing), sharing (to your story, to another user by direct message, or by link), and commenting (visible to anyone else able to see the post, regardless of whether they follow your page). Stories, which are visible for only 24 hours, can usually be liked, reacted, and replied to as well as shared (some users' privacy settings may not allow replies and/or sharing). Instagram's Explore page features a grid of algorithmically-selected content by pages you do not follow, based on accounts you follow and content you have previously liked ("How posts are chosen for Explore"). The insights Instagram offers to its users shows how many views on their posts came from the home page (followers' feeds), Explore, or elsewhere. This is useful to know if your posts are reaching your existing followers and new viewers.

### **Reddit:**

Digital cultural theories Dr. Adrienne Massanari describes the social media website Reddit as "fertile ground for anti-feminist and misogynistic activism" (329). Massanari credits this to a combination of the platform's algorithm, governance, and user culture. Massanari claims that Reddit "implicitly reifies the desires of certain groups (often young, white, cis-gendered, heterosexual males) while ignoring and marginalizing others" (330). Much of the content prevalent on Reddit "demonstrate[s] retrograde ideas of gender, sexual identity, sexuality, and race and push against issues of diversity, multiculturalism, and progressivism" (Massanari 333). While Reddit seems to cultivate toxic cultures in direct opposition to those I have observed on Instagram, it does so in similar ways: "sharing[...], commenting, and recounting memes and stories to encourage community connection" (Massanari 334). Reddit thus serves as another example of digital community and its means of formation, but not for the same members as those I have observed and befriended on Instagram.

### **Facebook:**

A 2021 study of Canadian media habits found that 77% of mothers are on Facebook (Calabretta). This establishes the social media site as a key component of the "mamasphere": a digital space in which users gather to share content related to motherhood (Bauer and Ngondo 49). In the Canadian cultural context, "working mothers experience pressure to conceal their personal lives" (Bauer and Ngondo 46) leading to feelings of social isolation. The expectation of working mothers to keep their personal and professional lives separate helps to explain why they turn to Facebook, meme sharing, and the "mamasphere" as both an outlet and resource. For many people, "social media provide[s] a place [...] to 'gather' in their isolation. [...] [Coming] together online to share personal stories, news, resources, and memes" (Bauer and Ngondo 47).

In our interview, memmer and activist @eyerollsandbloodlust echoed this evaluation, stating that "most of these moms are in these groups on Facebook." She went on to discuss her early days on Facebook engaging with liberal memes before skewing further left and being pushed out by boomers: "Facebook was literally turning against us. The older generation, the Boomers, the people who had accumulated all this wealth, they were weaponizing this tool." She went on to say, "Facebook for me is just not an option anymore, and I think that Instagram might go that way too." For now though, Instagram is still where you will find her sharing memes and community actions: "Instagram is very image focused. It's image first and so that's what I enjoy."

For Instagram user @thisyearisruined, choosing to use Instagram is as much about the choice to *not* use other platforms: “I cannot justify adding more apps [to my phone] that take away from my productivity.” She says, “Instagram works for me. I am able to connect with my local community with resources and memes are a plus.” Instagram is “just all about images,” said one anonymous Instagram user, making it “a better meme sharing platform [than Facebook].” This focus on the image helps to explain Instagram’s popularity amongst Millennials, a generation known for their love of image-based media (“Picture This”).

Meme scholar and Associate Professor in Communication Arts at the University of Waterloo Dr. Shana MacDonald describes her time on Instagram engaging with memes as being meaningful, despite platform capitalism, the user-data-driven business model behind sites like Instagram (Srnicsek), and the money her clicks make for the site. According to Dr. MacDonald, memes are more “relatable sites of content” than other forms of media. Most notable to Dr. MacDonald is the social aspect of memes: “I get to take it in, digest it, make meaning from it for myself, and then share it with my friends.” Like mothers on Facebook and politically-right young men on Reddit, many Millennial and gen-Z queers turn to Instagram to enrich or supplement their social lives. Users combat their isolation by sharing personal stories, news, resources, and connecting with others over shared interests and experiences through memes.

### **Mastodon:**

In December 2020, there was an ultimately unsuccessful push amongst some of my meme-creator peers to move to the social media site Mastodon. Mastodon’s website describes it as a “Free, open-source decentralized social media” that does not use advertising, algorithms, or site-wide guidelines, instead allowing each server to create its own host of rules (*Mastodon*). This push temporally aligned with an Instagram boycott purportedly organised by online sex workers, who called for the boycott to combat Instagram’s censorship and its damaging effect on their ability to do business through the site (*themme\_fatale*). The boycott itself led to a rise in tension in my meme circles, however, where some memers also engaged in sex work decried the boycott and called into question the leadership behind it. They claimed that queer sex workers of colour in particular were not consulted by organizers of the boycott and suggested that white meme creators not doing full-service sex work were using the boycott to push users off of Instagram onto their own Mastodon servers. This push would consequently move users away from potential customers and the community of sex workers established on Instagram. There is a significant crossover between meme creators and sex workers, who use their experiences to inspire memes and their memes to promote their sex work.

### **Instagram Censorship:**

One such example is Stacy Sadistic aka @gaymemescheap, a meme creator and porn star. In our interview, Stacy had this to say: “Well I don’t really like Instagram, but that’s where the eyeballs are.” She referred to the level of censorship on Instagram as “extremely restrictive,” particularly when it comes to content about sex work, queer identity, and mental health. Stacy described some of the ways memers will circumvent Instagram’s censorship, such as intentional misspellings and codewords: “as the algorithm rushes to catch up, to ban more and more words that describe our identities, we end up making more and more obscure secret phrases, like ‘alphabet mafia’ instead of LGBTQIA” (see fig. 11, fig. 22).

@canada.gov.ca, who effectively blurs the lines between memer and more traditional storyteller with long thoughtful posts about outrageous anecdotes and artefacts of Canadiana, shared his secrets for gaming the algorithm: if “[I] haven't posted for a while, I'll do like stories the day before a post to kind of remind Instagram that I'm alive,” which he claims results in a bump in engagement with subsequent posts. He has also found that starting a multi-slide post with a face helps, laughing as he says, “Instagram obviously loves the face, right?” “Face for the algorithm” has become a common caption on people’s posts and stories when trying to promote their own content or share social justice content like mutual aid requests, petitions, and calls to protest, in an attempt to circumvent potential censorship (see fig. 23).

As meme creators work to outsmart and sidestep the censorship present on Instagram and many dream of an alternative platform, there remains a resounding attachment to the site. While it is far from perfect and may in time go the way of Facebook as some of my interview subjects seem to think, it has also provided the conditions under which the meme community in which I have found myself has flourished. Through my research-creation process I have reached the conclusion that the original intention for this project to transition away from Instagram onto a new website would be unsuccessful at this time. Director of the Columbia Institute for Tele-Information, Eli Noam, supports this conclusion, stating that, “community is shaped by the ability of its members to communicate with each other. If the underlying communications system changes, the communities are affected” (Noam 3). In this chapter I have endeavoured to demonstrate that Instagram is an essential component of my meme community and not merely its present or temporary location. The affordances of the platform and the already-established community there cannot simply migrate to a new site. However long the alternative meme community in which I am embedded may last, it is inextricably tied to the social media site Instagram.



## Your Post Goes Against Our Community Guidelines

We removed your post because it goes against our **Community Guidelines** on hate speech or symbols.

Even if you didn't mean to offend, our guidelines encourage people to express themselves in a way that's respectful to everyone.



Post removed for hate speech or symbols

Posted Oct 20, 2019 12:13:22 PM



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### Hate speech or symbols guidelines ▼

Figure 21 A screenshot of an Instagram message I received after my meme was removed on the grounds of “hate speech or symbols.” The meme features a pink Care Bear and reads, “gender is fake but I still hate men.”

**INSTAGRAM COMMUNITY  
GUIDELINES WHEN  
I CALL MYSELF A SLUR**



**INSTAGRAM COMMUNITY  
GUIDELINES WHEN  
SOMEONE ELSE  
CALLS ME A SLUR**



Figure 22 An original meme by the author, with two images of Simpson’s Police Chief Wiggam next to blocks of text. The first shows an angry Wiggam aggressively pointing his gun, with the Instagram logo photoshopped onto his sleeve. The text reads, “Instagram community guidelines when I call myself a slur.” The second image features a smiling Wiggam, eating donuts off his gun with several more held in his hat and a sprinkle stuck to his lip. The text reads, “Instagram community guidelines when someone else calls me a slur.”

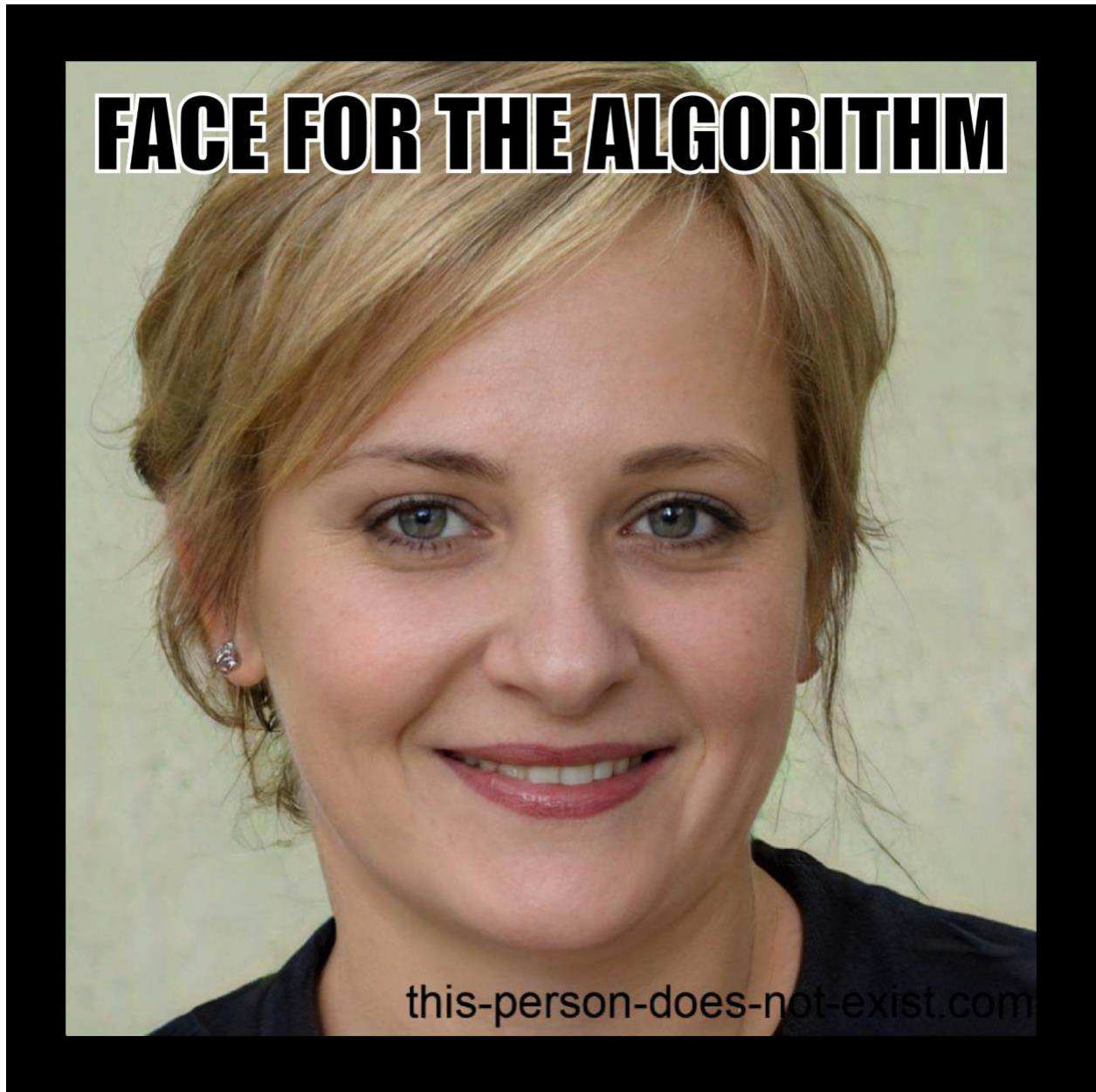


Figure 23 An original meme by the author, featuring a closeup AI-generated photo of a white woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, smiling, with the generator's watermark "this-person-does-not-exist.com." Text reads, "face for the algorithm."



## Conclusion

While memes continue to grow in popularity, both in and out of academia, meme scholarship to date has not addressed the particular phenomenon my research has attended to: that of a digital community formed through and around queer, leftist memes on Instagram, or, alternative Instagram memes. As I define them, *alternative Instagram memes* are made using unique but interreferential styles that may or may not utilize existing meme formats. These memes, typically expressing non-normative personal identities and experiences, are posted to pages by their creators. These meme creators are often mutuals, following one another's pages, and sometimes in communication through comments on each other's posts and direct messaging.

As an active member in this community, I was uniquely positioned to conduct this work. Through the creation of original memes, the curation of memes by my peers, several interviews, Instagrammatics, discourse and thematic analyses, I have worked to answer the research questions: 1) How do the memes created by myself and my peers enable the formation of a digital community while negotiating vulnerability, intersectional identities, and leftist ideology? 2) How do the Dear Diary Memes enable collective digital storytelling within an intimate public? 3) How intrinsic is the site of Instagram to this community?

I began the #deardiarymemes project in 2019 by sharing my intention to bring other people's voices into my memes, along with a submission form for people to make anonymous diary-style entries. In the Spring of 2022 I relaunched the submission form after receiving university research ethics approval. Of the subsequent submissions received I remediated 41 into memes and posted them to my Instagram page, @rude\_oil\_pipeline. I then collected the Instagrammatics for these 41 posts, which averaged at 315 likes, 27 shares, 38 saves, 5 comments, and one reply per post. Through discourse analysis I determined that the primary themes represented in the #deardiarymemes submissions and subsequent posts are mental health, struggles with interpersonal relationships (dating, friendship, and family), gender and transition, and issues of class and capitalism. The comments and conversations that unfolded below these posts consisted primarily of expressions of compassion, empathy, and of people identifying with the stories told in the memes, often adding their own chapters to those stories through their comments.

In addition to the 41 #deardiarymemes, I curated a selection of memes by my peers and by myself that speak to my findings: that there is a community built around queer, leftist memes on Instagram through which community members express marginalized elements of their identities and lived experiences. This community is comprised of people creating, sharing, and otherwise interacting with and around memes, who make use of the affordances of the Instagram platform, such as the ability to like, save, share, comment on, and reply to comments on a post.

In my meme practice and in this work, I have endeavored to put the *me* in meme. However, in order to speak to identities represented in my meme community that I do not myself hold, and to supplement my own experiences with the perspectives of others, I conducted interviews with seven participants found through my Instagram meme page. I posted a callout looking for interview subjects and received responses from a mix of people including meme creators I knew, meme creators I did not know, followers I have noticed interacting both my own posts and those of my peers, followers I had never interacted with, and a fellow meme scholar. I asked each participant a set of questions regarding their meme consumption and creation habits, what brings them to Instagram, and their evaluation of this community. In general my interview subjects create and consume memes to represent themselves and to connect with others – through



posting to a meme page, sharing a meme to a friend or to their story, sending a memer a message, or commenting on a meme. Overall, my participants agreed that they felt like part of a community oriented around alternative Instagram memes: memes that are original, creative, and speak to identities and political stances underrepresented in other forms of media and other hubs of memeing, such as Reddit and Facebook. I believe there is a subculture on Instagram of predominantly queer people with leftist political stances who love memes that is inextricable from the Instagram platform as its site at this moment in time.

I intended to interrogate how this work might function differently if diverted off of Instagram onto a new website, however, through my research process I found that this would not be a worthwhile endeavor and have instead worked to demonstrate why Instagram is essential to this community at this time. While the consensus is that Instagram is the place to be for memes in my community, there was also a general feeling of uncertainty as to how long this will last. It will be necessary to continue to study this community in order to determine how it may be affected were its members to stop using Instagram to share and consume memes in the future.

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## Appendix A



### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

**Study Title: Alternative Instagram Memes: Intersectional Community and Collaborative Storytelling in the Digital Age**

**Researcher: Piper Curtis**

**Researcher's Contact Information: [piper.curtis@concordia.ca](mailto:piper.curtis@concordia.ca) (438)-884-6967**

**Faculty Supervisor: Alessandra Renzi**

**Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: [alessandra.renzi@concordia.ca](mailto:alessandra.renzi@concordia.ca)**

**Source of funding for the study: FRQSC**

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN Alternative Instagram Memes: Intersectional community and collaborative storytelling in the digital age**

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project being conducted by Piper Curtis of The Communications Department of Concordia University ([piper.curtis@concordia.ca](mailto:piper.curtis@concordia.ca); 438-884-6967) under the supervision of Alessandra Renzi of The Communications Department of Concordia University ([alessandra.renzi@concordia.ca](mailto:alessandra.renzi@concordia.ca)).

#### **A. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the research is to take part in the creation of a meme series that explores the digital intimacies of people interacting through and around Instagram memes.

The goals of the study are as follows:

1. To explore how the creation and circulation of memes by myself (as @rude\_oil\_pipeline) and my peers enables the formation of a digital community while negotiating vulnerability, intersectional identities, and leftist ideology.



2. To explore the forms of digital intimacy and the dynamics of confession and mutual absolution enacted through community-driven co-creation of memes on Instagram.

## **B. PROCEDURES**

If you participate, you will be asked to participate in one or more of the following stages between February 2023 and May 2023.

1. Interview - 0.5 hour
  - a. This is a one-on-one interview with the main researcher (Piper) to be conducted either through Instagram messenger or through Zoom video/audio call. They will first provide a general explanation of the research and you will have a time to ask questions. After this, Piper will ask prepared questions, leaving space for follow up questions. You are free to skip a question at any time.
  - b. Location: Remote (online).
  - c. These interview/workshops will be recorded from the chat as a text-based transcript and/or recorded as audio-only Zoom calls. "I am recording these sessions because I may refer back to these recordings to write my thesis and to create memes to help explain this research. I may also use the archived interviews for reference if I am completing similar research projects in the future."
2. Co-creation – variable timing
  - a. Following the initial interview, Piper will select quotes to use for meme creation. You will be asked to co-create memes with Piper and/or to create memes of your own based on the interview transcript and your reflections afterwards. Participation in this stage is optional.
  - b. These memes will be saved for use in Piper's research-creation thesis, will be displayed on an original website and may be displayed on the @rude\_oil\_pipeline Instagram page with your desired level of accreditation.
  - c. Location: Remote.
3. Contribution of preexisting memes
  - a. You may choose to contribute pre-existing memes of your own creation that relate to the interview topics. Piper may also request to use memes you have previously posted, contingent on your consent.

- b. These memes will be saved for use in Piper’s research-creation thesis, will be displayed on an original website and may be displayed on the @rude\_oil\_pipeline Instagram page with your desired level of accreditation.
- c. Location: Remote.

Total Participation Time: Minimum 0.5 hours – variable.

The data and discussions produced during this research will be used in the completion of Piper Curtis’s MA Thesis consisting of a written thesis and public website component, which will be published on the Concordia Spectrum Platform. Some excerpts from this work may also be presented at academic conferences and re-published in peer-reviewed academic journals.

### C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include:

1. Discussion of personal experience that may be triggering
2. Potential alienation from the digital community I am investigating if you recount negative experiences or potentially controversial opinions
3. There is the potential of losing followers if you share content your followers do not agree with
4. If you decide to participate in the meme creation, there is a risk of non-consensual republishing. **This means that a third party could use images of your memes online or in print without consent from you after they are posted publicly in the context of my work.**

You might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include:

1. To talk about yourself and share your stories with others
2. To share your opinions about an internet subculture in which you participate, which may help to promote an image of that subculture you feel sincerely represents you
3. Increased exposure of your meme page
4. Some meme creators monetize their work, therefore increased exposure could potentially translate into financial gain, though this would likely be minimal

This research is not intended to benefit you personally.

### D. CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will gather the following information as part of this study:

1. Audio recording / text transcript of the preliminary interview
2. Observational notes throughout the interviews
3. Co-created and curated memes
4. The final artistic output produced as part of the study
5. Consent form
6. Contact information for logistical communication

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The written information gathered will be coded in the case that participants wish to remain confidential. That means that the information will be identified by a code. The researcher will have a list that links the code to your name.

We will protect the information by:

1. Keeping Text and Audio data stored on a two-factor authenticity secure computer and hard-drive in the researcher's personal residence until the completion of the research project
2. Keeping data and reflections in a notebook at the researcher's personal residence. Data that may be transcribed to the Excel and Pages applications will only be available on a password-protected computer.

Only the researcher will have access to the electronic and physical copies of the files.

The data and discussions produced during this research will be used in the completion of Piper Curtis's MA Thesis consisting of a written thesis and public website component, which will be published on the Concordia Spectrum Platform. Some excerpts from this work may also be presented at academic conferences and re-published in peer-reviewed academic journals. Please indicate below whether you accept to be identified in the publications, dissemination and other related activities:

I accept that my name and the information I provide appear in publications of the results of the research.

Please do not publish my name as part of the results of the research.

Once the MA thesis is completed, participants will be sent a selection of their data upon request. A selection of data will be **archived indefinitely** as it may be need for reference in future research. **Future research refers to a secondary use of data for projects unrelated to the current one.**

**The data that will be archived will be used to explain and contextualize the work.**

All footage that participants do not also receive and all other communication and personal information will be deleted after 5 years.

Do you agree to be contacted in the future for reuse of your data for other research purposes?

Yes

No

In certain situations, we might be legally required to disclose the information that you provide. This includes situations where the researcher learns that the participant intends to cause serious harm to him or herself or others, as well as situations of abuse. If this kind of situation arises, we will disclose the information as required by law, despite what is written in this form.

## F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If **you decide that you don't want us to use your information and data, you must tell the researcher within seven days after the preliminary interview. If you do so, all of your information and data will be deleted, and you are not required to participate any further in the study. If you would like to withdraw your information you are still able to participate in the co-creation portion.** If you withdraw later than June 1<sup>st</sup> 2023, then previously collected data will be used for the purpose of the study, however, it will be anonymized.

As a compensatory indemnity for participating in this research, you will receive a single payment of \$25 CAD for participating in an interview OR of \$50 CAD for contributions of original memes and/or memes made collaboratively with the researcher. **Participants contributing both memes and interviews will receive only the single payment of \$50 CAD.** If you withdraw before the end of the research, you will still receive the indicated compensation. To make sure that research money is being spent properly, auditors from Concordia or outside will have access to a coded list of participants. It will not be possible to identify you from this list.

We will tell you if we learn of anything that could affect your decision to stay in the research.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

We will not be able to offer you compensation if you are injured in this research. However, you are not giving up any legal right to compensation by signing this form.

## G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).



## Appendix B

*MY MEME DIARY IS  
OFFICIALLY REOPENING*

**#deardiarymemes**  
**submissions are open**  
wanna spill your guts  
and inspire some memes?  
make an anonymous entry  
in my meme diary via  
the link in bio!

### **ETHICS STATEMENT:**

The memes created through this project  
will be a source of study for my thesis at  
concordia university. While no entries  
will be shared, the memes and related  
findings will be made public in my thesis.

 **WRITE IN MY DIARY**

**Please read the ethics statement before  
submitting and DM me with any questions!**

#deardiarymemes call for submissions



#deardiarymemes entry 1



rude\_oil\_pipeline



Dear Diary,



*I don't feel like I can truly  
live up to my  
carefully curated  
online persona*

[View insights](#)

[Boost post](#)



Liked by sunforger\_band and 263 others

[rude\\_oil\\_pipeline](#) #deardiarymemes... [more](#)

September 8, 2022

#deardiarymemes entry 2

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

*Dear diary.*

*how do i close the 97 tabs open in my head?*

View insights Boost post

Liked by misc\_\_haha and 399 others  
**rude\_oil\_pipeline** #deardiarymemes... more  
 View all 4 comments  
 October 14, 2022

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

*Dear diary.*

Comments

@!!!!!!!.n 72w   
 if you find the answer, let me know 😊 1  
 Reply Hide

rude\_oil\_pipeline 72w  
 @!!!!!!!.n ahha will do 💖  
 Reply

silly\_n\_silky 72w   
 thatd b botiful framed up on a wall 🌸📱 1  
 Reply Hide


rude\_oil\_pipeline 72w  
 @roachie\_silky bless aesthetic sailor moon imagery ✨ 1  
 Reply

#deardiarymemes entry 3



**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

*DEAR DIARY,*



*I LOVE MY PARTNER AND I CARE SO DEEPLY ABOUT THEM BUT IM NOT SURE IM ACTUALLY IN LOVE*

View insights Boost post

Liked by smelly.pasta and 282 others

**rude\_oil\_pipeline** #deardiarymemes... more

View all 4 comments

October 16, 2022

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

*DEAR DIARY,*



*IS IT THEM OR IS IT THAT IM ONLY EVER HAPPIEST SINGLE? ARE WE NOT MEANT TO BE? OR WOULD I BE THIS UNHAPPY WITH ANYONE?*

View insights Boost post

Liked by smelly.pasta and 282 others

**rude\_oil\_pipeline** #deardiarymemes... more

View all 4 comments

October 16, 2022

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

*DEAR DIARY,*

**Comments**

- toad\_soda** 71w ❤️ 🌐 ❤️ 1

Oofsy daisys

Reply Hide
- rude\_oil\_pipeline** 71w 🌟 ❤️ 1

@toad\_soda

Reply
- brotherbaphomet** 71w ❤️ 🌐 ❤️ 1

oh fuck

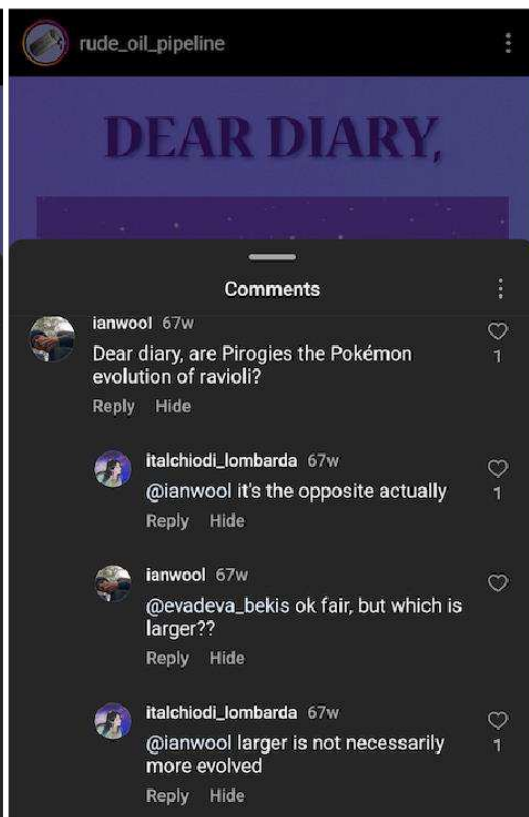
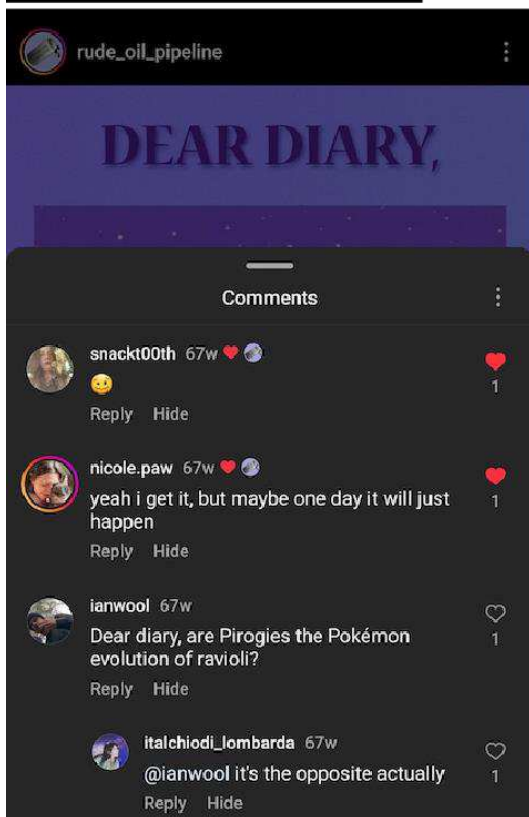
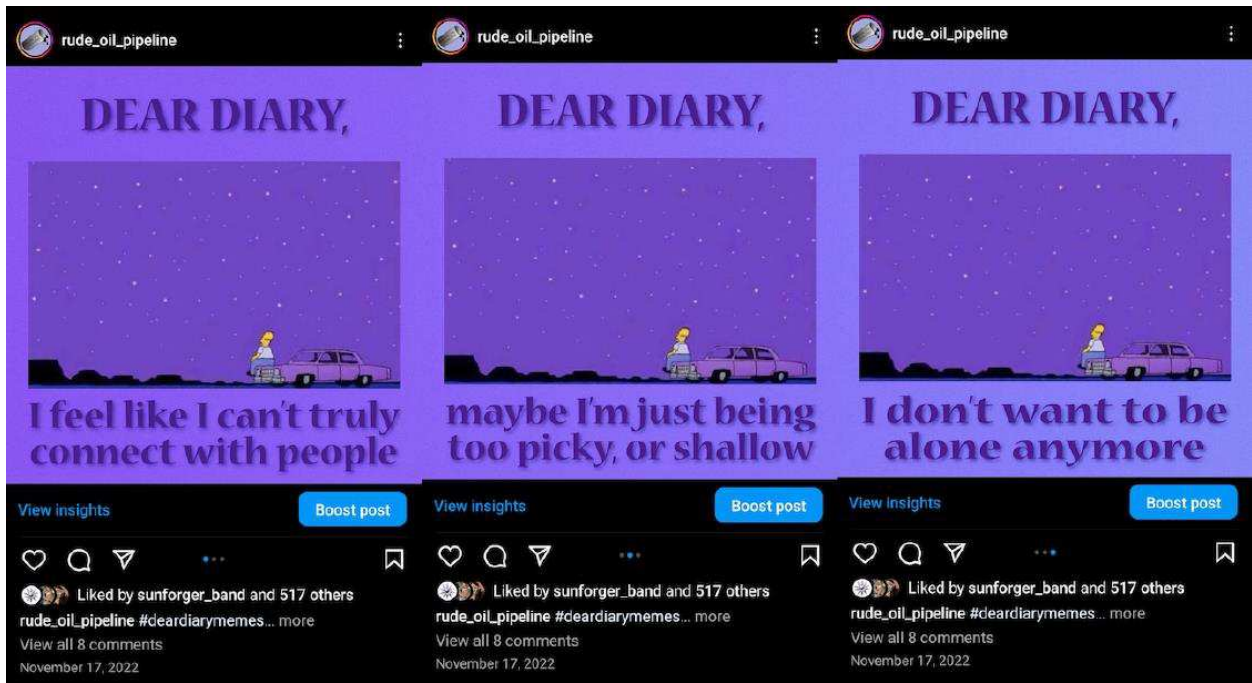
Reply Hide
- rude\_oil\_pipeline** 71w ❤️ 1

@brotherbaphomet uh oh

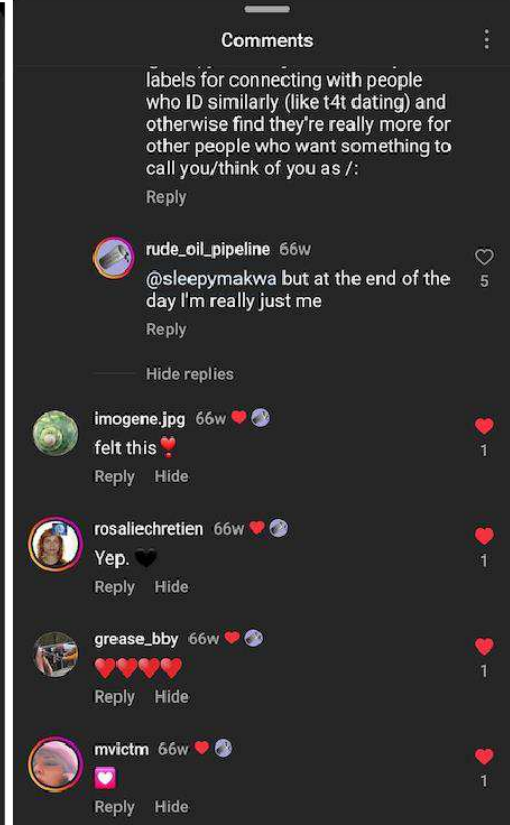
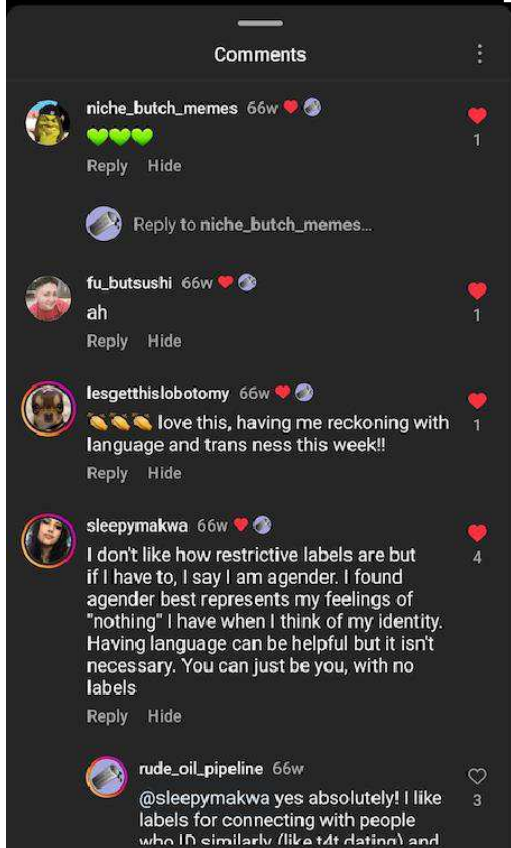
Reply See translation

#deardiarymemes entry 4






#deardiarymemes entry 5



#deardiarymemes entry 6

rude\_oil\_pipeline

Dear Diary,



*I feel like people will never see me how I see myself*

View insights Boost post

Liked by hi\_tec\_trekfashionmemes and 153 others

rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes... more

View 1 comment

November 28, 2022

Comments

silly\_n\_silky 65w ❤️ 🌐

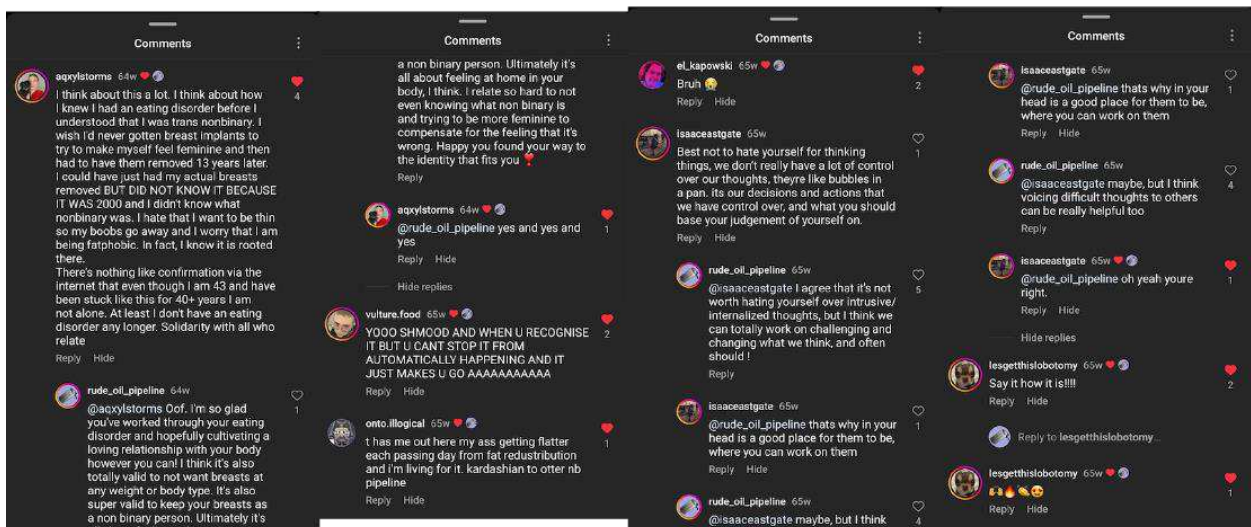
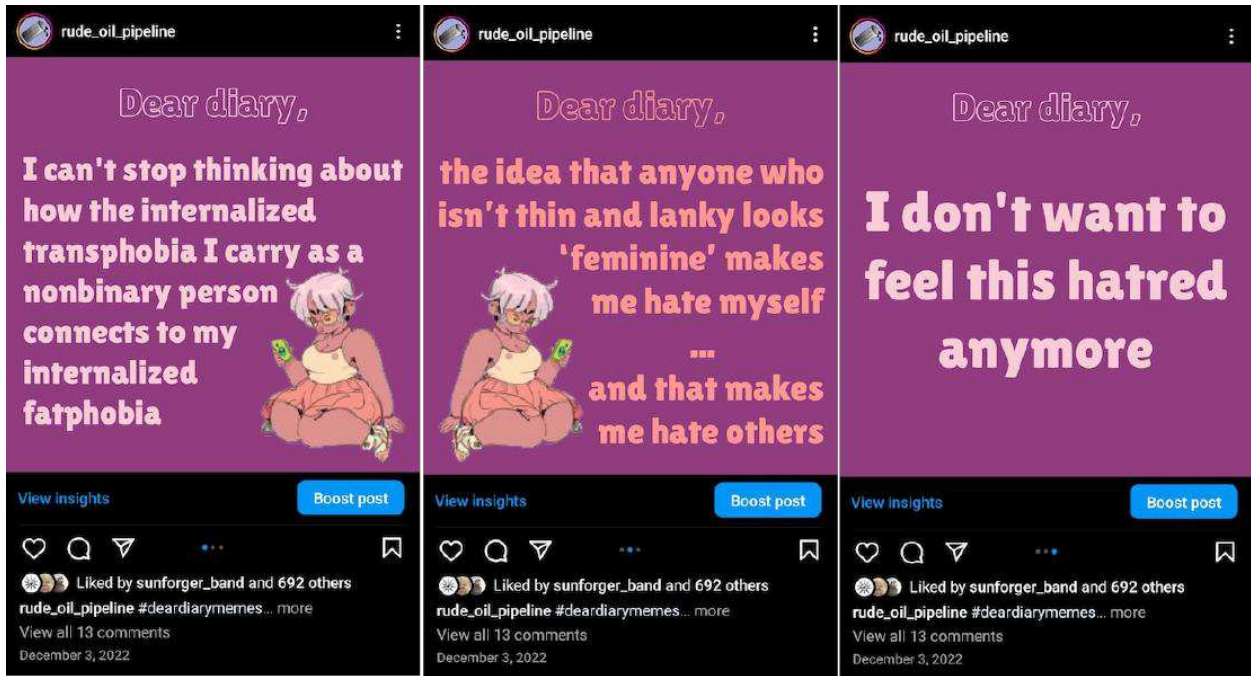
oof

Reply Hide

1

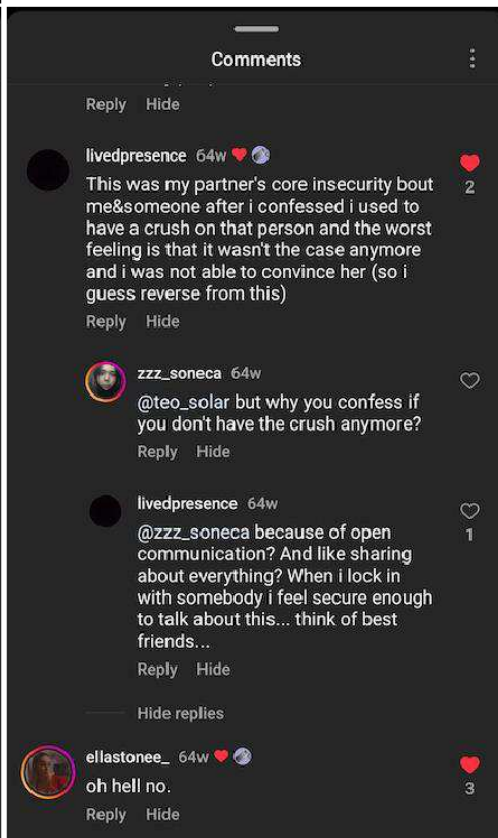
#deardiarymemes entry 7





#deardiarymemes entry 8





#deardiarymemes entry 9

The image displays a grid of Instagram content. The top row shows three posts from the user 'rude\_oil\_pipeline', each featuring a cartoon mouse in a cowboy hat against a dark blue background. The text on the posts reads:

- Post 1: "DEAR DIARY, I hate Texas. I wish I could go back home even though my childhood homes are gone. I feel so alone here. I have no support system. I have no family or friends here. I wish I'd never moved."
- Post 2: "DEAR DIARY, I should've stayed with my family. I would've had more time with my dad, but now he's gone. I'm not sure what to do with my life."
- Post 3: "DEAR DIARY, I'm so sad and alone."

Below each post are interaction buttons like 'View insights' and 'Boost post', and a caption area showing 'Liked by normaljosp and 601 others' and 'View all 23 comments'.

The right side of the image shows a 'Comments' section for the first post, with comments from users like 'schlossleuis', 'whenequanimity', 'slimemoth', and 'rude\_oil\_pipeline'. The bottom section shows a 'Comments' section for the second post, with comments from users like 'king\_simp\_js\_dead', 'adrian.tai', '6884.stefano', 'stephanie\_turt', 'mictm', 'daxyetmhansak', 'clenched.fist.with.hair', 'desktop\_background', 'heidhulahoop', 'poonani.mami', 'craftysmoke', and 'italchiodi.lombarda'.

#deardiarymemes entry 10



**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

**Dear Diary,**

I know I will likely be on psych meds for the rest of my life, but I fear I will never get off the super-high-dose-short-half-life-horrible-brain-zappy-withdrawal medication I'm currently on. And I fear that I will re-lapse/compromise my sobriety if I try to taper off this med.



View insights [Boost post](#)

Liked by sunforger\_band and 553 others  
**rude\_oil\_pipeline** #deardiarymemes... more  
 View all 17 comments  
 December 14, 2022

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

**Dear Diary,**

I've been on meds since just after turning 11 and I don't know what my baseline is. I don't know how to conceptualize my bodymind as something capable of sustaining itself without pharmaceutical support. I think this is a deep-rooted aspect of my larger struggle to trust myself.



View insights [Boost post](#)

Liked by sunforger\_band and 553 others  
**rude\_oil\_pipeline** #deardiarymemes... more  
 View all 17 comments  
 December 14, 2022

**Comments**

**kandiwhips** 63w 1  
 i believe in u! keep up in ur vitamins, magnesium, & b12 have helped me tremendously off ssri's- i'm no doctor so do ur reserch before trying anything- but there is hope and u can do it  
 Reply Hide

**and\_id** 63w 1  
 Sending hugs to anyone feeling this.   
 Reply Hide

**and\_id** 63w   
 Me too cuties me too.  
 Reply Hide

**maxgreen\_111** 63w 1  
 What Pristiq does to a mf  
 Reply Hide

**maxgreen\_111** 63w 1  
 Omg the brain zaps   
 Reply Hide

**themanneance** 63w 1  
 yeah brain zaps are fucking awful  
 Reply Hide

**Comments**

**harry3716** 63w 1  
 Hang on friendo . I may just be a stranger on the internet, but I believe in you.  
 Reply Hide

**alysaalanae** 63w 4  
 Funny that this comes up now that i'm a year and a half off effexor and contemplating whether or not i need to go back on kt  
 Reply Hide

**liz.beth.rocks** 63w 1  
  
 Reply Hide

**fadotobeige** 63w 1  
  
 Reply Hide

**thrasheddoll** 63w 4  
 been there, and after 12 years i'm off psychiatric drugs... u can also get there too... it sounds like u've been told ur a chronic psychiatric case, but trust me ur not... ur just going thru a rough patch rn... keep on keepin' on and take what u can get, support and meds included.. I hated it when ppl would say this to me, but it's

**Comments**

**thrasheddoll** 63w 4  
 been there, and after 12 years i'm off psychiatric drugs... u can also get there too... it sounds like u've been told ur a chronic psychiatric case, but trust me ur not... ur just going thru a rough patch rn... keep on keepin' on and take what u can get, support and meds included.. I hated it when ppl would say this to me, but it's important... "ur loved"  
 Reply Hide

**thrasheddoll** 63w 2  
 @thrasheddoll oops... so yes, "ur loved"... don't forget that, and do ur best to hang onto the love u have for urself... that's the toughest waiver... all the rest is just fiction <3  
 Reply Hide

**megs\_1** 63w 1  
 Hang on! the taper may feel like shit but distract yourself with activities that don't compromise your sobriety   
 Reply Hide

**cat.hollis** 63w 2  
 \*laughs nervously\* \*slowly backs away, med kit rattling like a maraca\*  
 Reply Hide

**Comments**

urself... that's the toughest waiver... all the rest is just fiction <3  
 Reply Hide

**megs\_1** 63w 1  
 Hang on! the taper may feel like shit but distract yourself with activities that don't compromise your sobriety   
 Reply Hide

**cat.hollis** 63w 2  
 \*laughs nervously\* \*slowly backs away, med kit rattling like a maraca\*  
 Reply Hide

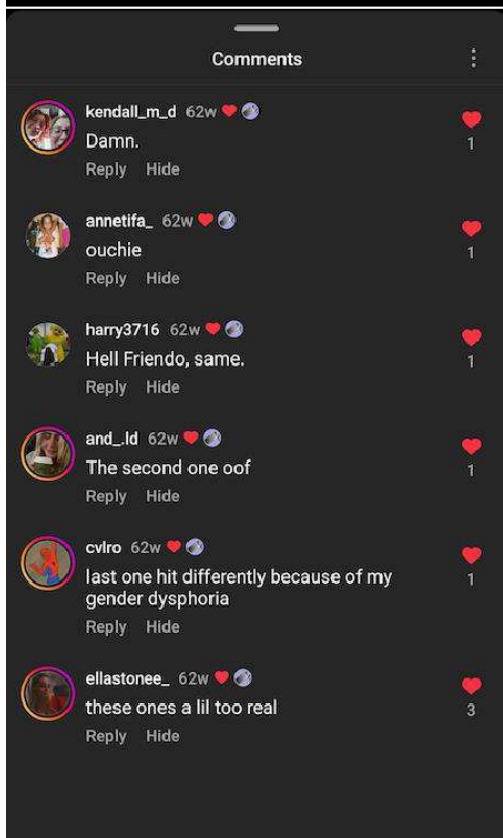
Reply to cat.hollis...

**amyxsalt** 63w 1  
 Wow, you wrote this perfectly   
 Reply Hide

**slygovs** 63w   
 Desvenlafaxine??   
 Reply Hide

**soupbaby95** 63w 4  
 Damn this feels targeted  
 Reply Hide

#deardiarymemes entry 11



#deardiarymemes entry 12

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

**Dear Diary,**

I don't think my best friend values me as a person because she only seems to talk down to me. I can't end it because we've been friends for too long, but I'm also sick of feeling less-than because of her. I often wonder if she would even notice if I disappeared.



[View insights](#) [Boost post](#)









 Liked by [misc\\_haha](#) and 127 others  
**rude\_oil\_pipeline** #deardiarymemes... more  
[View all 2 comments](#)  
 December 30, 2022



**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

**Dear Diary,**

I don't think my best friend values me as a person because she only seems to talk down to me. I can't end it because we've been friends for too long, but I'm also sick of feeling less-than because of her.

**Comments**

 **and\_ld** 61w    2  
 Oh honey  I had this issue too with my long high school bestie and in the end I blew up at her because I'd kept it on for so many years. I hope somehow communication can let her know she's hurting you  I hope it's not intentional   
[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

 **queer.dreams** 61w    2  
 dump her  
[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

#deardiarymemes entry 13



The image shows a screenshot of an Instagram post and its comment section. The post is from the user 'rude\_oil\_pipeline' and features a cartoon illustration of Winnie the Pooh with a purple butterfly on his head. The text on the post reads: "DEAR DIARY, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A WHILE, I THINK I'LL BE OK". Below the post, there are icons for liking, commenting, and sharing, along with a 'Boost post' button. The post has been liked by 'sunforger\_band' and 251 others. The comment section shows a comment from 'silly\_n\_silky' posted 59 weeks ago, which says "i think so too pooh".

#deardiarymemes entry 14

The image shows three Instagram posts from the user 'rude\_oil\_pipeline' and a section of their comments. Each post features a cartoon of Bart Simpson sitting on a desk, looking thoughtful, with a 'Dear Diary' header and a paragraph of text.

**Post 1 (Left):**  
 Dear Diary,  
 I don't know how to trust my feelings, I don't know if they're real or if I made them up, just to feel something. But they are scary feelings, and they're always there. I don't wanna talk about them cause talking about them makes them real. But what if I'm just kidding myself?

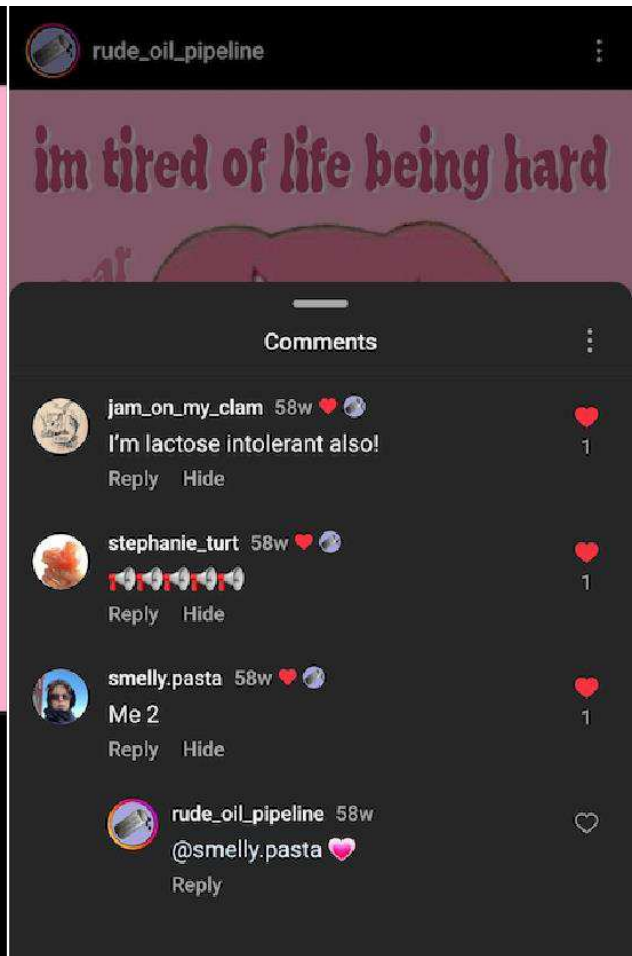
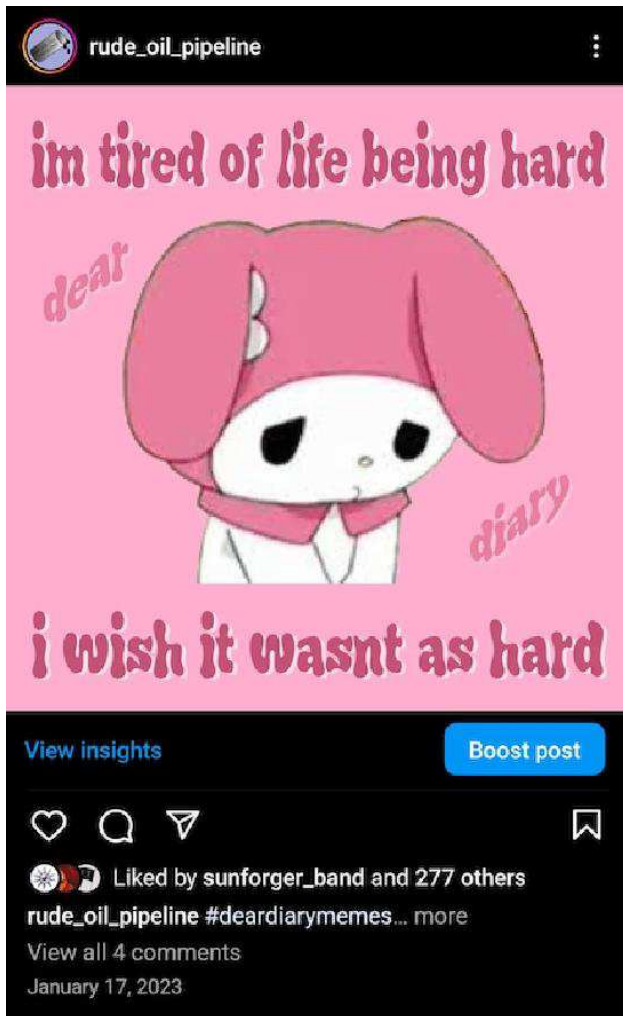
**Post 2 (Middle):**  
 Dear Diary,  
 I'm afraid to talk about my feelings because I might have to face the fact that my problems are not as big as they seem in my head. Because I might be confronted with other people's problems, and with the fact that I am not the center of the world.

**Post 3 (Right):**  
 Dear Diary,  
 I feel doomed and I don't wanna be helped, this depression is my personality - without it I don't know who or what I am. I can't live. I can't navigate society and personal interactions, or take on responsibilities, or be an adult. I want a way out. So what do I do next? I die? Or do I just go on by inertia, just like I've done so far?

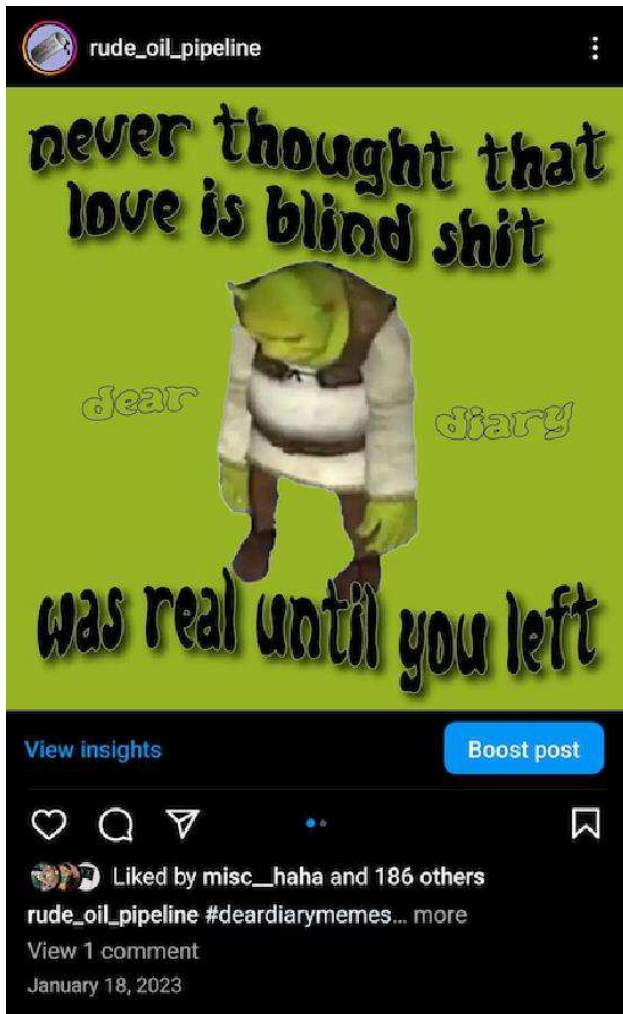
**Comments Section (Bottom):**

- austinbly** 58w ❤️👍👍👍  
 Reply Hide 1
- mossygayfae** 58w ❤️👍👍  
 Reply Hide 1
- isaaceastgate** 58w ❤️👍👍  
 Forgetting who you are i think normal part of depression. All that energy seems to just go into surviving. All the unique and beautiful parts get buried away safe like a seed for a better season.  
 Reply Hide 3
- cOrianna** 58w ❤️👍  
 All of these. Very relatable. ❤️  
 Reply Hide 1

#deardiarymemes entry 15

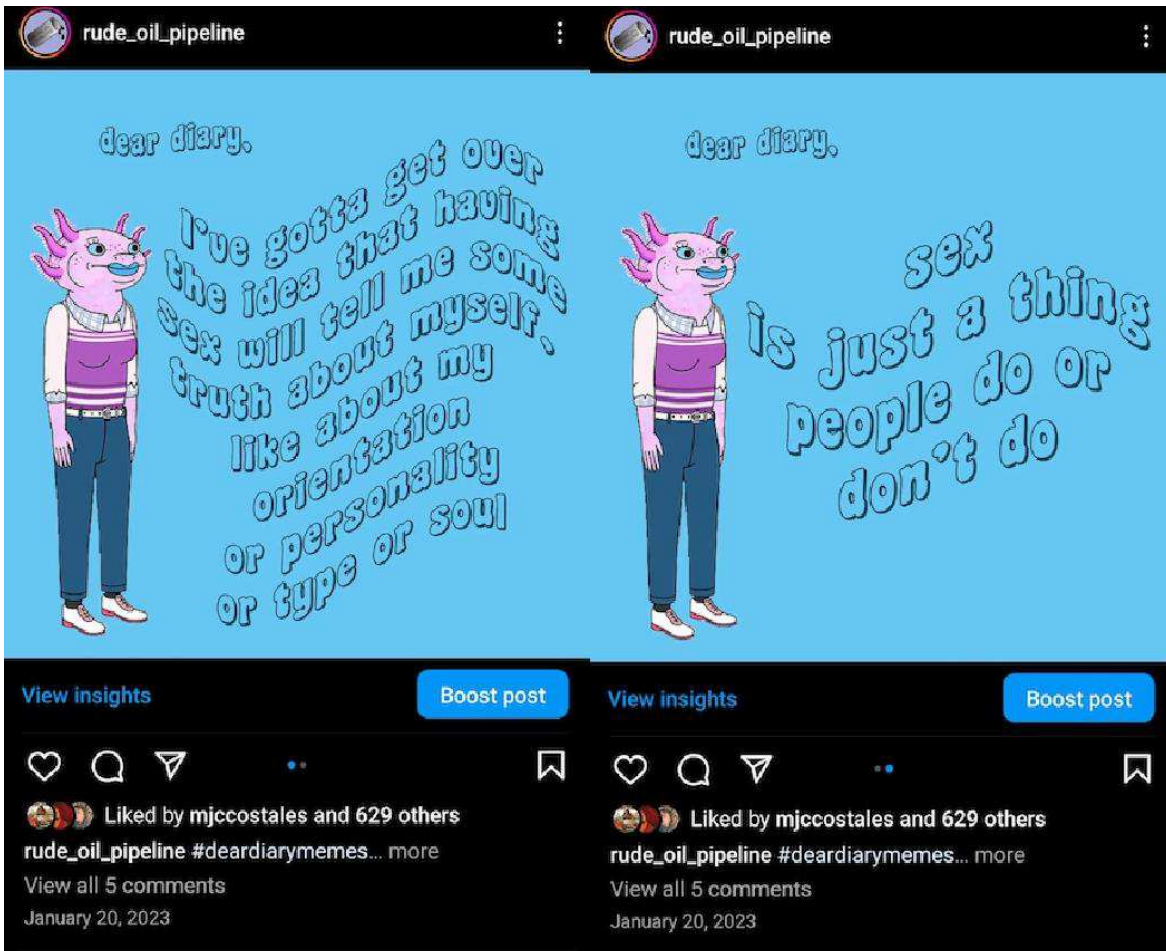



#deardiarymemes entry 16



#deardiarymemes entry 17






- Comments**
- 
**rascal\_is\_philadelphic** 58w ❤️🌐
 


Now replace "sex" with anything.

2

Reply Hide
  - 
**hellacurious** 58w ❤️🌐
 


why is this image screaming at me

3

Reply Hide
  - 
**and\_id** 58w ❤️🌐
 


Might as well be riding a bike

1

Reply Hide
  - 
**huan.been** 58w ❤️🌐
 

asex goddesses

4

Reply Hide
  - 
**xothisgirlisacurse** 58w ❤️🌐
 

love that u picked yolanda for this 🙄

5

Reply Hide

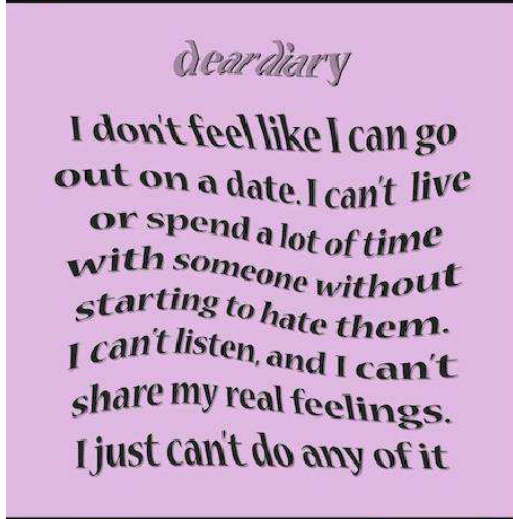
#deardiarymemes entry 18





View insights Boost post

Liked by sunforger\_band and 371 others  
rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes... more  
View all 5 comments  
January 21, 2023



View insights Boost post

Liked by sunforger\_band and 371 others  
rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes... more  
View all 5 comments  
January 21, 2023



View insights Boost post

Liked by sunforger\_band and 371 others  
rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes... more  
View all 5 comments  
January 21, 2023

- Comments
- anti\_language\_priest 57w  
If I have a gf now then u can I swear  
Reply Hide 1
  - lacroixslut 57w  
Reply Hide 1
  - Reply to lacroixslut...
  - zeynepkartal 58w  
omg same  
Reply Hide 1
  - meg.ontheedge 58w  
Too real 😞  
Reply Hide 1
  - s3nle\_cin3file 58w  
Reply Hide 1

#deardiarymemes entry 19

**Dear Diary,**  
Last night I had to take my mom to the emergency room. She got into my car and started banging her head on the window and I just took her into my arms, for the first time in my life.

I've rarely been affectionate to my mom in my 23 years, it's not in my nature and it's something I am trying to unlearn.

View insights Boost post

Like Comment Reply

Liked by knitting\_band and 507 others

rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes cw parent in mental health crisis... more

View all 13 comments

January 24, 2023

**Dear Diary,**  
She felt small and fragile even though she is much bigger than me, and I cried with her. I cried because I was afraid, because I didn't want to lose her.

She was making threats on her life and I was determined to do everything in my power to keep her alive. We got to the hospital and she changed her mind when we got inside.

View insights Boost post

Like Comment Reply

Liked by knitting\_band and 507 others

rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes cw parent in mental health crisis... more

View all 13 comments

January 24, 2023

**Dear Diary,**  
She didn't want to do it anymore, she couldn't. She went back to my car and I begged her to please take my hand, that I would be with her every step of the way and I just needed her to get some help.

She just needs a break. She tries to do so much and doesn't take care herself until her mind collapses on itself and all of her bad thoughts come out.

View insights Boost post

Like Comment Reply

Liked by knitting\_band and 507 others

rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes cw parent in mental health crisis... more

View all 13 comments

January 24, 2023

**Dear Diary,**  
I left her in the car and went back inside to ask the nurse what I could do, she told me I would have to call the sheriff to Baker Act her. That was terrifying to me, especially considering police aren't trained to de-escalate mental health emergencies.

But I called 911, the dispatcher was so kind and told me I was doing great and I was doing everything I needed to.

View insights Boost post

Like Comment Reply

Liked by knitting\_band and 507 others

rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes cw parent in mental health crisis... more

View all 13 comments

January 24, 2023

**Dear Diary,**  
I told it was so hard to see her like this, she acknowledged my pain and sent the sheriff in my direction.

My mom convinced the sheriff she was fine, so I had no option but to take her back home to her husband and pray that she lived through the night.

She did, but I'm still shaken to my core over the whole experience.

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Like Comment Reply

Liked by knitting\_band and 507 others

rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes cw parent in mental health crisis... more

View all 13 comments

January 24, 2023

**Dear Diary,**  
I have never seen my mom like that before, or maybe I have but not to that extent. I've never had to take charge of her like that. It was a situation where all you want is your mom, but she's right in front of you, sobbing and begging for death, and you have to just choke back your tears and take her hand and pray she'll be okay.

I'm still praying.

View insights Boost post

Like Comment Reply

Liked by knitting\_band and 507 others

rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes cw parent in mental health crisis... more

View all 13 comments

January 24, 2023

Comments

flazohilli 57w 2

Went through this type of situation both ways with my mom I wish I could know her pain and I wish she could know mine I wish she never saw me strung out I wish she never saw the evil that lurks in my heart I hate seeing her cry it eats at my soul

Reply Hide

anna\_hoszu 57w 2

Being a mum (with mental health issues) of a three year old I hope I will never have to put my daughter in a similar situation like this! No child deserves to go through this. As a daughter, I am going through this everyday for the past 10 years since my mums mental and physical health started to decline, and I've been looking after her mentally, financially, physically. Its taken a huge toll on my mental health and I would never ever want to inflict this sort of burden on my daughter. Its a awful experience seeing your mum diminish and turn into something that is not a mother anymore. It is heartbreaking. Hope everyone is ok x

Reply Hide

rachaeltajima 57w 3

sometimes we're the mom, sometimes we're the kid

Comments

un\_liamone 57w 3

I've had similar situations, but in a way completely different. this hit me hard, hope youll both be ok 🙏🙏 also yea, I've consciously been trying to be more affectionate to my family, because id hate to realise one day that I hadn't been. obsv it wont solve things but it might help a little

Reply Hide

rude\_oil\_pipeline 57w 1

@liammooo

Reply

luvgr111 57w 4

I've been in the same situation before); it's so so terrible

Reply Hide

rude\_oil\_pipeline 57w 2

@luvgr111

Reply

glimmerofcat 57w 4

being there for ur mom during that is so hard & strange. i'm in a similar boat. i hope things get better for you both

Reply Hide

Comments

glimmerofcat 57w 4

being there for ur mom during that is so hard & strange. i'm in a similar boat. i hope things get better for you both

Reply Hide

rude\_oil\_pipeline 57w

@glimmerofcat

Reply

and\_id 57w

Did you write this or is this a submission?

Reply Hide

rude\_oil\_pipeline 57w 2

It's a submission!

Reply

kittenburg 57w 1



Reply Hide

camelia.theperson 57w 2


Reply Hide

#deardiarymemes entry 20








 **rude\_oil\_pipeline** 

*dear diary,  
today I decided to start therapy  
a tiny daisy bloomed in my head  
but my soul is still fighting  
storms of anxiety*



[View insights](#) [Boost post](#)

 Liked by [sunforger\\_band](#) and 129 others

[rude\\_oil\\_pipeline](#) [#deardiarymemes...](#) [more](#)

January 26, 2023

#deardiarymemes entry 21



rude\_oil\_pipeline



I'm searching without aim



dear diary


dear diary

and feeling unfulfilled

[View insights](#)

[Boost post](#)



 Liked by sunforger\_band and 87 others

[rude\\_oil\\_pipeline](#) [#deardiarymemes...](#) [more](#)

January 30, 2023

#deardiarymemes entry 22



rude\_oil\_pipeline



**I had a weird dream last night**

**I am  
splitting up  
with my  
boyfriend, f**



[View insights](#)

[Boost post](#)



Liked by misc\_haha and 97 others

[rude\\_oil\\_pipeline](#) [#deardiarymemes...](#) [more](#)


January 31, 2023

#deardiarymemes entry 23



**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

**i thought everyone else in the entire world would get older and i would stay the same forever and now that i am aging**



**i am terrified and don't know what i am going to be when i grow up because i am already dying**

[View insights](#) [Boost post](#)

Liked by **sunforger\_band** and **332 others**  
**rude\_oil\_pipeline** #deardiarymemes... more  
[View all 5 comments](#)  
 February 6, 2023

Comments

**fairy\_transfather** 55w

Uh oh!

[Reply](#) [Hide](#) [See translation](#)

**mystomachhertz** 55w

Time to go listen to Landslide

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

**rude\_oil\_pipeline** 55w

@mystomachhertz wow truly

[Reply](#)

**fadetobeige** 55w

I feel this. 😞

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

**anti\_language\_priest** 55w


same

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

#deardiarymemes entry 24

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

**DEAR DIARY I DON'T KNOW IF THERE'S A POINT TO ALL THIS WHEN THE CLIMATE IS ON THE BRINK OF COLLAPSE**



**DO I ASPIRE TO ANYTHING OR DO I SIMPLY GO TO BED?**

[View insights](#) [Boost post](#)

Liked by [misc\\_\\_haha](#) and 415 others

[rude\\_oil\\_pipeline](#) [#deardiarymemes](#)... more

[View all 2 comments](#)

February 8, 2023

**Comments**

[kdgems](#) 55w I \*feel\* this. 1

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

[cat.hollis](#) 55w Hahahahaha\*laysdown\*hagahahaha 3

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

[Reply to cat.hollis...](#)

#deardiarymemes entry 25

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

Dear Diary,  
I'm listening to  
Crystal Castles.  
Is that cause I'm  
going through  
puberty again?

View insights [Boost post](#)

Liked by misc\_haha and 178 others  
rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes... more  
View all 3 comments  
February 8, 2023

**Comments**

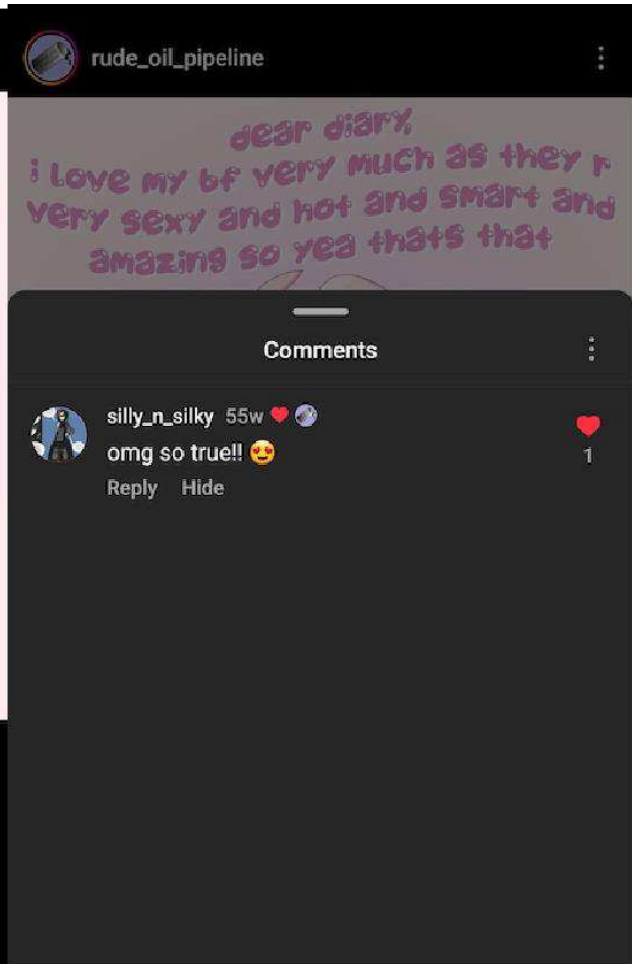
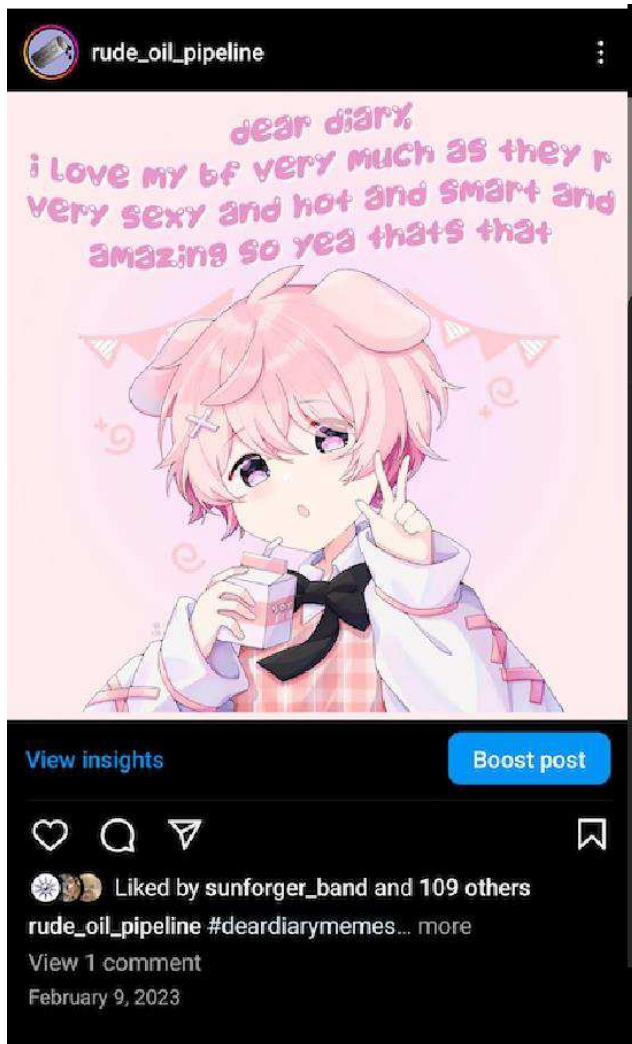
**heather.beather** 55w  
I found my crystal castles shirt and cant remember what they sound like  
Reply Hide

**peptobimb0** 55w  
@heather.beather we wio wa wei wo ooo ah ooo ooo  
Reply Hide See translation

**buried.fiber.optic.cable\_gf** 55w  
@heather.beather dululeelele bleepboppbeep duleieieiele dbloolb bop beep  
Reply Hide

Hide replies


#deardiarymemes entry 26




#deardiarymemes entry 27




**dear diary,**  
I grew up poor and just now realize how much of a trauma this was. I still don't feel like I deserve a lot of things.



**dear diary,**  
Even though I earn my own money now, I have enormous remorse turning on a heater or eating a whole bag of snacks in one sitting. I only buy sale items, even my food.



**dear diary,**  
I told my mom about how I thought all of this was really hard. She started making fun of me.



View insights Boost post

Liked by fancyclownery and 745 others  
rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes... more  
View all 16 comments  
February 10, 2023








View insights Boost post

Liked by fancyclownery and 745 others  
rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes... more  
View all 16 comments  
February 10, 2023







View insights Boost post

Liked by fancyclownery and 745 others  
rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes... more  
View all 16 comments  
February 10, 2023







Comments

-  semiprecious\_synergy 54w ❤️ 1  
Purge your parents 🤪  
Reply Hide
-  nonfatmelk 55w ❤️ 3  
Ugh same :( I've been trying to find joy in things outside of consumerism and it helps relieve the existence financial dread a bit  
Reply Hide
-  the\_ravens\_nest\_crafts 55w ❤️ 2  
Mom get rekt. This shit is hard 🤪  
Reply Hide
-  \_trudge 55w ❤️ 1  
:(  
Reply Hide
-  hipervisible 55w ❤️ 2  
you deserve the world 💖💰🌟  
Reply Hide
-  thewaythru 55w ❤️ 2  
❤️  
Reply Hide
-  weather\_enjoyer 55w ❤️ 3  
im sorry 🤔

Comments

-  gynmopedie 55w ❤️ 3  
This is so real  
Reply Hide
-  mother.of.pigs 55w ❤️ 3  
I'm sorry that your mom made fun of you ❤️ that must have felt incredibly hurtful. You're not alone  
Reply Hide
-  protozoo\_epilettico 55w ❤️ 10  
Dear writer it's all gonna be OK. And remember money spent on therapy aren't wasted  
Reply Hide
-  kaleschnikovkirby 55w ❤️ 3  
Health insurance is paying for it ❤️  
Reply Hide
-  bald.misandrist 55w ❤️ 3  
Except I'm still poor so I'll never be able to justify doing things that make me happy  
Reply Hide
-  bald.misandrist 55w ❤️ 2  
Fr  
Reply Hide

Comments

- wasted  
Reply Hide
-  kaleschnikovkirby 55w ❤️ 3  
Health insurance is paying for it ❤️  
Reply Hide
-  bald.misandrist 55w ❤️ 3  
Except I'm still poor so I'll never be able to justify doing things that make me happy  
Reply Hide
-  bald.misandrist 55w ❤️ 2  
Fr  
Reply Hide
-  sillylittlefits 55w ❤️ 3  
this hits 🤔🤔  
Reply Hide
-  dirteater5000 55w ❤️ 4  
I love you whoever wrote this and you deserve the world  
Reply Hide
-  lawnchairio 55w ❤️ 3  
I am going to cry  
Reply Hide

#deardiarymemes entry 28



rude\_oil\_pipeline



*Dear diary,*

*Sometimes the objects we hold dear remember stories when we forget. A keyboard dredged up getting sober the first time and the trains that would roll by my porch. The music of my isolation was a cozy respite in Massachusetts winter.*

*When I hear those songs now I wish I could share both a warm meal and a tender embrace with a person who was not yet me. Just a few minutes of shared tenderness to keep the frigid dark of a broken boiler at bay.*



[View insights](#)

[Boost post](#)



Liked by alisonsfaygo and 52 others


[rude\\_oil\\_pipeline](#) [#deardiarymemes...](#) [more](#)

February 13, 2023

#deardiarymemes entry 29





**rude\_oil\_pipeline**


Dear diary, my partner left me a while ago and I still love them







It hurts so much that I could be so disposable to them

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 February 15, 2023

Comments

 **biglotsjesus** 54w    4





Love happens in seasons, and just because they're gone doesn't mean the love doesn't exist or wasn't worth the effort

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

 **ithurtz2p** 54w  1





@biglotsjesus thank you

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

 **sadbutfunny666** 54w    1





real

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 **clint\_neastwood** 54w    1

Big mood.

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 **the\_ravens\_nest\_crafts** 54w    1

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#deardiarymemes entry 30





rude\_oil\_pipeline



Dear Diary,  
I love finally  
getting to  
know myself



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Liked by normaljosp and 83 others

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February 15, 2023

#deardiarymemes entry 31









**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

**Dear Diary,**  
**I miss his lips. His eyes full of stars and wonder everytime he sees me. His shy smile and soft voice. Just how he expressed his feelings with his tender touch.**




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 Liked by **sunforger\_band** and **72 others**  
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 February 16, 2023


**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

**Dear Diary,**  
**Will I ever get to kiss him again? Will I ever get to fix his shirt's collar when it's crooked, feel the warmth of his skin as my fingers brushed against his neck?**  
**Will I get to smell his perfume one last time? And relive those beautiful, but few precious moments we had one summer?**



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 February 16, 2023

#deardiarymemes entry 32

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

*Dear Diary,*

It has been getting easier and easier to love myself,  
and to let myself accept that love.  
When I was a child I was not a fool, I was a child.  
As an adult I am not a stupid idiot, I am learning.




*Things are good,  
and they will  
continue to be.*

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Liked by normaljosp and 575 others  
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**Comments**



**kalaschnikovkirby** 53w

1


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**bribr everything** 53w

1


[Reply](#) [Hide](#)



**bea.lactea** 53w

Thank you for this 2


[Reply](#) [Hide](#)



**milk\_tread** 53w

2

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)



**whatableblob** 53w

aw 2

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

#deardiarymemes entry 33



rude\_oil\_pipeline



Dear Diary,  
I have spent so much time  
with family and friends who tear  
me down that I have trouble  
believing I have any good qualities



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Liked by normaljosp and 265 others

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February 22, 2023

#deardiarymemes entry 34

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

Dear Diary,  
 I'm a thirty-something and my birthday is tomorrow.  
 My elderly friend is dying.  
 I hate the events going on in the world that I have no control over.  
 I hate that I can't avoid seeing an ad.  
 The spam phone calls. The spam texts.  
 I feel empty inside. I am just existing here until climate change kills us.

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Liked by misc\_haha and 390 others  
 rude\_oil\_pipeline #deardiarymemes... more  
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 February 26, 2023

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

Dear Diary,  
 I am beautiful. Loved.  
 And I still have no desire to have children.  
 I am surrounded by poverty.  
 I don't have clean drinking water in my community and I am a loner here.  
 Intergenerational trauma has impacted some more severely than others. I am fortunate not to be a drug addict, alcoholic, or criminal like so many in my community.

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Liked by misc\_haha and 390 others  
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 February 26, 2023

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

Dear Diary,  
 But it's lonely. I'm an outsider and am considered "white washed".  
 There is no voice for regular women who are Indigenous that have no desire for "the red path" or traditional teachings.  
 I should feel lucky to be a full-time student and part-time employed, but where do I fit into the grand scheme of things?

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Comments

irinasuperhuman 52w ❤️🌍 1  
 Mmmm same here  
 Reply Hide

ladydeadfoot 52w ❤️🌍 1  
 Third slide is so relatable  
 Reply Hide

imdr3am1ng 52w ❤️🌍 2  
 Oof right in the heart with this one, sending all the love left in my chest to anyone who reads this 🍀  
 Reply Hide

thisyearisruined 52w ❤️🌍 1  
 Thank you  
 Reply Hide

mdkd\_1312 52w ❤️🌍 1  
 slide three hit but i am a drug addict 🤔👉  
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abortland 52w ❤️🌍 1  
 ❤️❤️❤️  
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Comments

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 awe  
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the.isolationista 52w ❤️🌍 1  
 ❤️  
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#deardiarymemes entry 35



**rude\_oil\_pipeline**




ANY CHANCE AT LOVE FEELS LIKE I'M WATCHING A TRAIN SPEED TOWARDS ME. I WANT TO RUN FROM IT.

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Liked by **dadbodleo** and 192 others  
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 February 26, 2023

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**




THIS TIME I'M TAKING THE RISK TO GET ON. I'D RATHER LOVE AND GET HURT THAN NOT LOVE AT ALL.

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Liked by **dadbodleo** and 192 others  
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 February 26, 2023

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

IF I TAKE A STEP BACK, IT MIGHT RUSH BY. OR IT MIGHT SLOW DOWN AND LET ME CLIMB ABOARD.



DEAR DIARY

I DON'T KNOW. THIS TIME I FEEL MORE READY.

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Liked by **dadbodleo** and 192 others  
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**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

IF I TAKE A STEP BACK, IT MIGHT RUSH BY. OR IT MIGHT SLOW DOWN AND LET ME CLIMB ABOARD.

**Comments**


**cabocha.pdx** 52w   
 I love this   
 Reply Hide

**rude\_oil\_pipeline** 52w  
 @cabocha.pdx thanks   
 Reply

#deardiarymemes entry 36

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

Dear diary,  
I am so fucking lonely.  
I am tired of masking neurotypical  
tired of being closeted at work  
and tired of not "stirring the pot"  
about politics.




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Liked by sunforger\_band and 433 others  
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February 27, 2023

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

Dear Diary,  
Yes, people like me more and I get  
threatened less but I am just as  
lonely if not more than before.  
And I'm tired of fucking christians  
hitting on me.




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Liked by sunforger\_band and 433 others  
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February 27, 2023

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

Dear diary,  
I miss me. I feel like I should be  
ashamed but I'm not. I was just  
trying to survive and be loved but  
at least I know now it doesn't work.




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Liked by sunforger\_band and 433 others  
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February 27, 2023



**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

Dear diary,  
I miss me. I feel like I should be  
ashamed but I'm not. I was just  
trying to survive and be loved but

Comments

- 
am.devito 52w
❤️

🙄

Reply Hide
- 
Reply to am.devito...
- 
kdgems 52w
❤️

💖💖💖


Reply Hide

#deardiarymemes entry 37

**rude\_oil\_pipeline**

**Dear Diary,**

I recently entered a relationship. I gave myself a few years to try and heal after a very abusive relationship, but I can tell that I'm still insecure and anxious. I am tired of those feelings taking over when I should be experiencing puppy love.



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 February 27, 2023

**Comments**

[lawnchairlo](#) 52w

😭 this series is the realest thing on ig rn  4

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[rude\\_oil\\_pipeline](#) 52w

@lawnchairlo omg thank you

[Reply](#)

[clenched.fist.with.hair](#) 52w

I'm finding my past relationships live on in my now-defence mechanisms and paranoia. When it gets bad, I end up acting like my abuser. It's like a nightmare. Dating with any kind of trauma can be a treacherous trail - but we take it when we feel ready to find all the neat little feathers and leaves and tiny bug fossils for your extensive collection that your landlord has yet to find out about  3

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

[anti\\_language\\_priest](#) 52w

I relate.  1

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[protozoo\\_epilettico](#) 52w

Reading Brigitte vasallo really helped me putting love and romantic relationships in a new prospective  1

[Reply](#) [Hide](#)

#deardiarymemes entry 38




rude\_oil\_pipeline

Dear Diary,



I've lost all of the close friends I've made as an adult. Some were my chosen family. Some left my life without saying why or saying anything at all.

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March 15, 2023






rude\_oil\_pipeline

Dear Diary,



Is it me?  
I can't stop thinking about what I might have done to make everyone leave me.  
Will I ever know?

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March 15, 2023






rude\_oil\_pipeline



Dear Diary,



Comments


mother.of.pigs 50w    2  
 Communicate! Ask! You'll never know if you don't ask. Even if it's not an answer you want to hear, it's closure, or it opens a dialogue to reconnect  
 Reply Hide


clemsaden 50w    2  
 damn that one is a big fkn OOF...  
 Reply Hide


rude\_oil\_pipeline 50w  2  
 @clemsaden it is 🤔  
 Reply

#deardiarymemes entry 39



rude\_oil\_pipeline



**I live in fear  
but of what,  
I do not know**

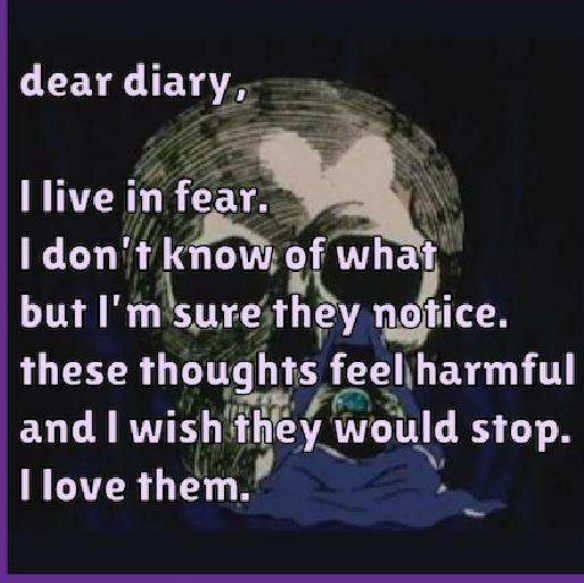
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rude\_oil\_pipeline Been a minute since I made one of these, but I'm finally getting to the backlog of... more

August 15, 2023

rude\_oil\_pipeline



dear diary,  
I live in fear.  
I don't know of what  
but I'm sure they notice.  
these thoughts feel harmful  
and I wish they would stop.  
I love them.

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rude\_oil\_pipeline Been a minute since I made one of these, but I'm finally getting to the backlog of... more

August 15, 2023

#deardiarymemes entry 40

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⋮
 rude\_oil\_pipeline
⋮

I WISH I COULD FIND A GOOD FUCKING JOB

DEAR DIARY

MY RESUME IS SO LONG BECAUSE I HATE WORK AND WON'T KEEP A JOB

I AM RUNNING OUT OF MONEY AND PATIENCE

DEAR DIARY

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December 14, 2023

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December 14, 2023

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