Stop using BeReal like Instagram

Some of you are using BeReal exactly the way it was intended to be used. For that, I applaud you. But some of you are using it in a very, very wrong way. You people know exactly who you are.

For those unfamiliar, BeReal is a social network that's an anti-social network in many ways. The app sends a notification to all users at a randomized time, informing them that it's "time to BeReal." In theory, users open BeReal immediately after receiving this notification, take a photo of whatever they happen to be doing at that time, and post it to the app. You can't see anyone else's BeReals until you post your own.

On paper, it's the opposite of Instagram. The latter app is notoriously curated – people fill it with beautiful, carefully edited photos of themselves doing glamorous things with large groups of adoring friends. You post your best moments and, crucially, do not post anything else.

But BeReal can't be curated – or at least, the intention is that it not be. It's the *real* you. A scroll through Instagram may make you feel like you're the only one spending your Friday night watching Netflix on your bed while everyone else is out on the town, but a scroll through BeReal reminds you that you're not alone. It's oddly comforting – it's perhaps the most effective online cure for FOMO there is.

At least, that's the intention.

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But BeReal has a fatal flaw that I believe is heavily interfering with its mission: the BeReal notification doesn't expire. While you may not post a BeReal before the notification goes out, you may post one any time *after* the

notification goes out (until the following day's alert does, of course).

As a consequence, there is very little stopping people from using this app the exact same way they use Instagram stories. That is, regardless of when the BeReal notification goes out, they consistently post at 8PM or so every night when they are inevitably doing something exciting. And they wind up with a BeReal that's full of artistic photos of coffee cups, martini glasses, beach sunsets, and selfies with friends in glitzy locales — a curated reel intended to impress their followers. In other words, Instagram stories.

I am seeing this among people I know (sorry, people I know), but I'm also a frequent scroller of the public Discovery feed, and this is clearly a trend that is growing across the platform.(And my frustration is *not* that these people are doing fancier things at 8PM than I am — put down the pitchforks, comments-section denizens.)

Now, I am not criticizing late BeReals in themselves. We are not all always available when the notification appears — I myself post BeReals that are a few hours late from time to time. But the people I'm talking about are not doing that. Rather, they are intentionally, consistently ignoring the timing of the BeReal notification and choosing to make their posts at the high points of their day. I do not think this is a blurry or subjective line. You know if you are in this category. You know it very well.

I understand why you all want to do this. The instincts that made Instagram the FOMO monster it is do not magically disappear when you're using a different app. Still, I do believe this behavior is harmful — it's antithetical to the appeal that drew many of us to BeReal in the first place.

Do BeReal like Barbara, not like an Instagram influencer.
Here is my case: When you join BeReal, you enter a social contract. I, as your fellow BeReal user, am opening part of myself to you. I am showing you that I am not truly the person you see on Instagram. I am showing you myself — shameless, bare, boring — because I expect that it might bring you some comfort.

And surely, that's the reason you joined BeReal, too, hypothetical BeReal Instagrammer. You joined because you had an itch that Instagram wasn't scratching. Some part of you wanted to see through the internet's cesspool of curated bullshit, too — and that's the sole thing that BeReal has promised to provide.

But that needs to be a two-way street. I open the mundane parts of my life to you because I hope that you will open yours to me. We can be each other's cure for the FOMO — we are the best weapons we have. But I'm asking you to give some of what you're taking.

BeReal users feel comfortable showing their boring, ugly selves on the app because other people are doing it, too. We blend into the sea. There is power in solidarity. The more the app is overrun with parties and artsy wine cocktails, the less comfortable everyone who wants to use it for its intended purpose will feel doing so. And then we will all lose the unique appeal that drew us to BeReal in the first place. We will just have a much worse, much buggier Instagram on our hands.

https://www.theverge.com/2022/8/20/23313295/bereal-instagram-app-curation-change