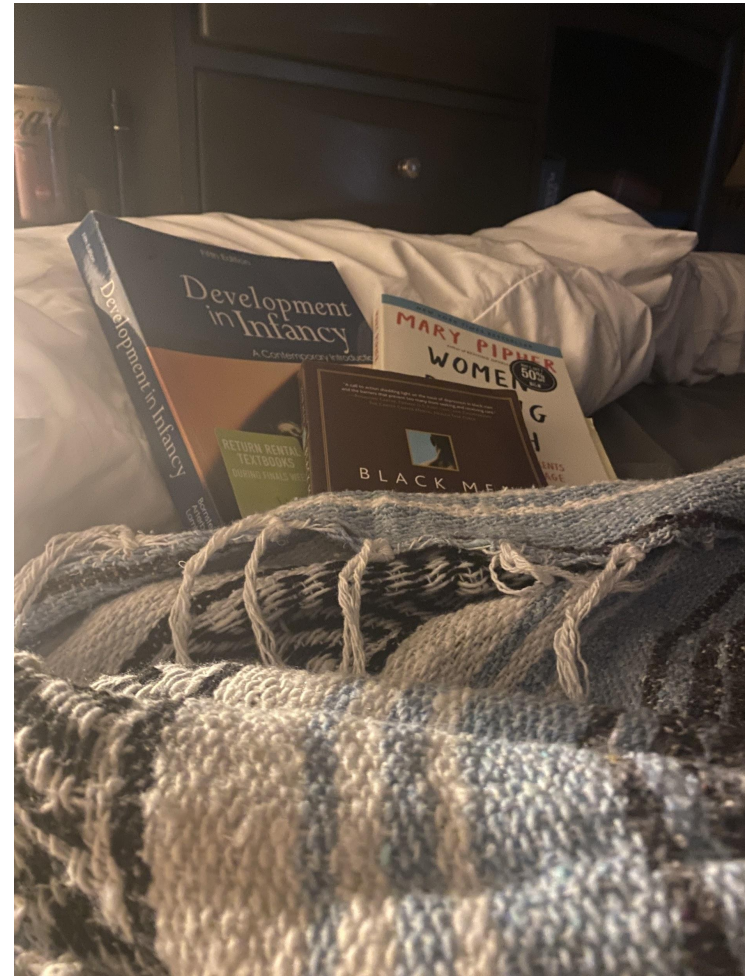


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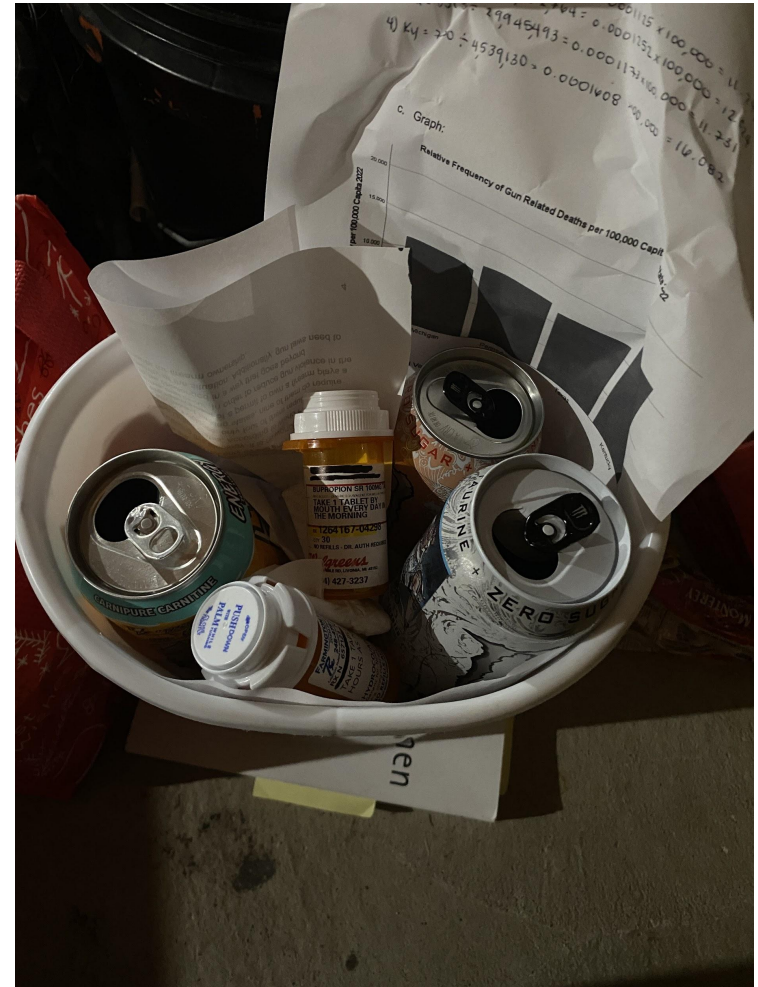
Mentally Ill, Working College Students

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I took this image while reading textbooks in bed one night. I found it odd because it felt like I was taking my books to bed with me and tucking them in. It was a strange reality check for my priorities in life. It felt like I was denying myself sleep because I was prioritizing my school work. I also know that sleep is very important for mental health. A healthy relationship with sleep is also based on leaving your bed for rest and rest alone. I knowingly disturb this association by reading my textbooks in bed. This photo hopefully will make people re-evaluate their priorities and shift them back towards themselves.



This is a real-life photo of a trash can after I cleared off my desk. In this trash can is used k-cups (bottom) along with empty energy drinks, homework assignments, and empty prescription medications. I took a picture of this trash can because it seemed very fitting to my everyday life. I worked so hard on that statistics assignment. I took my medication so I would feel well enough to get it done in time. I stayed caffeinated so I could stay awake until the deadline. All of that effort, just for the assignment itself to end up in a trash can. It felt so ironic. I recognize that the assignment was submitted for a grade, and yes, it was a good grade. However, I found it ironic that this assignment I worked so hard for, ended up in the trash. Not only that, but sometimes when I don't take my meds, I actually feel like I belong in that trash can right next to all of the byproducts of my daily life. I hope people see this photo and decide to re-allocate their energy into things that matter. Things that don't make themselves feel like garbage. Maybe it could even become an exercise. Write down those things that make you feel like garbage and put them in a garbage can. Visualize it and feel their effect, then change them.



This is a photograph of the pool table in my boyfriend's parents' basement; it's where I live. The unorganized books in the background feel like my brain. There is so much information, but none of it accessible. Meanwhile, on the table itself is a whiteboard with a list of chores, a bottle of Drano that I need to use on the sink, a waffle maker because my boyfriend's buddy was over and took my extension cord I use for our electric stovetop. We happen to have an extension cord for lights hanging by the pool table, so that is where I made my waffles. I resonate with the plants too, all crowded by the widow just trying to survive. The mug of coffee I made but forgot to drink. All of this clutter, and nobody can play pool. Sometimes, there is so much going on in life that we forget to do the things we enjoy. We forget to take care of ourselves. Sometimes we think that we are doing the best things for ourselves by overworking and crowding life with things we feel we need to do because just maybe, one day we will be in a better place; a better home, job, education status, etc.. Maybe one day. Maybe one day we need to take time to treat our mental health, not focus on our illness. Maybe one day I'll play a game of pool.



This is the backseat of my truck. This is where I take naps during my 12 hour school days. On the seat is a blanket I tried to use as a pillow. I'll sleep here for 2 hours just because I stayed up too late working on homework the night before. Or because I thought I would "treat myself" to an episode on Netflix rather than an extra hour of sleep. This is where I nap because I don't have the money to drive to and from school twice in one day to nap in my bed. I took a picture of this because it is real, yet every time I nap I hope nobody sees me. But in reality, there are so many people that relate to this photo it is scary. It tells me that too many of us are sacrificing not only our mental health, but our physical health as well. Hopefully, this photo brings awareness to how much sleep people get, and makes them realize how important their sleep is. If people want to continue working and doing school at the same time, they need to prioritize getting at least 8 hours of sleep every night, not every week.

