



BY ANNA MEIER
Columnist

Are you having sex tonight? Chances here at Truman are just as good as not.

As a pretty open-minded person, with no real convictions against premarital sex — other than believing that if you're not mature enough to buy condoms and use them, you're not mature enough to be having sex — I was shocked to hear from a group of friends last weekend that a surprisingly large number of women in our sorority alone are still virgins. Upon further investigation, this fact held true for women who graduated in 2004 and 2005.

Being the nosy person I am, I asked some of my friends outside the Greek system and found their group of friends is split almost evenly between virgins and non-virgins.

This seems strange to me for multiple reasons. The first is that in high school, it literally seemed like everyone was doing it. The people within that hormone-enraged

Talking About Our Generation:

Students maintain tight grip on V-card

community who were virgins practically wore a scarlet letter all their own. That was a long time ago in a setting where everyone knew everyone's business, but I just assumed that because my high school was like that, so was everyone else's.

Another reason this strikes me as funny is the amount of education we constantly receive through the media, doctors and schools about the drastic increase of STI's nationwide and the mass quantities of people aged 15 to 30 supposedly having unprotected sex with multiple partners on a daily basis.

Hence, to be having unprotected sex, people must be having sex in the first place. Other than that, the average age of virginity loss in the United States is between 16- and 17-years-old, according to time.com.

Lastly, this surprises me because of the entire "who shackled with whom" recap that occurs every weekend. Everyday, we hear gossip about sober shacks and drunken shacks and friends shacking with other friends' shacklers — the whole web gets quite confusing very quickly. If "Let's go back to my place" doesn't have the connotation of inviting sex, then I've been misled all these years.

Now that this whole myth I've been operating under about the majority of people I know being sexually active has come crashing down, I'm curious as to whether Truman is unique in this aspect. Liberal arts schools come with, obviously, a "liberal" implication, bringing to mind free love, hippy sex and

contraceptives galore. But, apparently that's not the case. For a liberal arts college, Truman actually has cast itself in a more conservative light for me, now calling to mind a more asexual world of shirts buttoned all the way up to the collar and a chastity belt in each dorm room.

OK, so maybe it's not that conservative, and there is always the possibility that the large number of college students still holding on to their V-Card is more prevalent than we've always thought. If that's the case, then I have a whole new set of questions about why our age bracket gets such a bad rap, constantly being categorized as sexually promiscuous. We are supposedly the ones responsible for the rapid spread of infections and the ones who caused the astronomical spike in HPV.

Maybe this large number of our peers who aren't doing the dirty says more things about us than we realize. Perhaps guys aren't as sex-driven and overcharged with testosterone as we think.

Or, maybe they are, and girls have just gotten better at rejecting their advances. Or maybe the sex education and media's scare tactics have finally gotten through to us, and we're simply too aware of the myriad of conse-

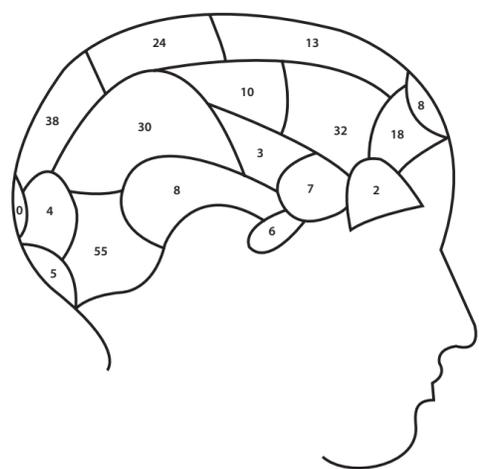
quences to even want to have sex.

Either way, I'm left with more questions than answers, wondering what kind of effect this is going to have on the future. There's certainly a possibility that if people aren't having sex in college, the spread of infection might slow down. There's also the distinct possibility, however, that those who wait until marriage might ultimately be disappointed. While I'm not for having sex with anything wearing pants, I do think a certain amount of curiosity is normal

and even healthy for a person's future relationships. If the virgins of today become the housewives of tomorrow, what happens when the day comes when they wonder what else is out there? They might wake up one morning and realize sex is more fun than they thought and feel trapped or overwhelmed by their monogamous experience, which could lead to infidelity.

It's a slippery slope we're walking here. In the end, keeping in mind the Jan. 14 edition of the Index about health benefits of sex, maybe Truman's campus would be a little happier if people decided to listen to Nike's old slogan and "Just do it."

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BY ELIZABETH NECKA
Columnist

I tend to agree with the Beatles — all you need is love. Sure, I'm a hopeless romantic, but I truly believe love is the most powerful of human emotions. In a life-or-death situation, any mother would gladly give her life to save her child — that's love. A man who drives four and a half hours in the middle of the night or flies halfway across the country for his long-distance girlfriend — that's love. Love is why people get tattoos, give up their bad habits and commit to a life with one person forever. Love is all-powerful.

But what exactly is love? I couldn't even begin to define the feeling within the word count of this column — the experience is almost too all encompassing to put into words. But the science of love is a different topic altogether.

Psychologists recently have become fascinated with the brain in love. In 2000 and again in 2004, for example, researchers at University College in London studied the brain functions of college-aged couples that claimed they were "madly in love." Surprisingly, small areas of the brain were activated in discussion or thought of the object of affection, but responsive areas were associated with

The Truman Experiment:

Oxytocin helps determine love matches

reward enjoyment, gut-responses and addictions. What an interesting statement on love.

These components of the brain become activated because of chemicals called neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters are released by an action potential in the brain, where activity in one neuron, or brain cell, ignites activity in another one. Without neurotransmitters, the brain could not function.

Oxytocin is a particularly active neurotransmitter in the process of experiencing love. For the 3 percent of mammals that are notably monogamous, oxytocin and dopamine are two of the chemicals that are released during sex. Although dopamine is the pleasure neurotransmitter that facilitates positive effect and enjoyment, oxytocin has been documented to increase social interactions and connections as well as trust in risky interpersonal relationships. For this reason, oxytocin is released even in a kiss, facilitating a more lasting connection. Oxytocin is also important in the bonds between mothers and their newborns. During labor and breastfeeding, a mother's levels of oxytocin soar, and in the early years, a mother's reassuring promises of love and affection increase a child's responsiveness to oxytocin later in life.

In a 1999 study in Behavioral Neuroscience, researchers at the University of Maryland injected reproductively naive voles, mouse-like creatures who notoriously mate for life, with various levels of the chemical oxytocin. They then exposed voles to a vole of the opposite sex for an hour. Later, the voles were put into a cage for a three-hour test. The vole they already had been exposed to for an hour was leashed on one side of the cage and an unfamiliar vole, a stranger, was leashed on the other side. Voles who had received the oxytocin treatment were significantly more likely to choose to associate and sustain more physical contact with the vole they had already met compared to voles who had received no such treatment.

Statistics show this isn't because of some random chance or a familiarity effect, but rather because of a bond between the voles. Blocking the neurotransmitters' release and reuptake led to no significant difference in liking the friend or the stranger vole.

Because humans and voles share similar patterns of DNA, generalizing this study's results to humans would suggest elevated levels of oxytocin truly do make us more ready to form bonds. Surely this study simplifies the glorious emotion we call love, but nonetheless, social preference is demonstrated. Taken in combination with various other research, we can assert that oxytocin plays a key role in determining mate preference and attachment.

Could oxytocin be the new love potion number nine? If high levels of oxytocin lead to monogamous mate preference, could a woman slip some into her less-than-committed man's drink with Valentine's Day dinner? Could a man who suspects his woman's fidelity buy her some oxytocin-infused chocolates? Although psychologists currently advocate oxytocin isn't strong enough to affect the feelings of love in human relationships because the experience of love in humans is compounded by a variety of more complex factors, it's still fascinating to consider the possibilities. Take, for example, the fact that most nasal sprays contain elevated levels of oxytocin. Imagine the increased demand in nasal decongestants resulting from its use as a love potion — you would no longer have to go down to 34th and Vine, as the song suggests, for your cure-all, but simply to the nearest Walgreen's.

I can't pretend to be an authority on what love is. Let's be honest, knowing the science of what happens within our brain when we fall in love won't help us better understand love or why it has such a power over us. But the fact of the matter is that it does have a certain power. "Two in love can make it." Love truly is awe-inspiring.

MEDITATIONS OF MICHELLE: Controlled breathing offers peace

BY MICHELLE MARTIN
Columnist

When stress or emotions cloud any thread of rationality existing within me, breathing brings me down to earth. As Zen Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh said, "Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor."

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar said breath is the link between your body, your spirit and your mind. Take a deep breath now and notice what happens. The outside world disappears. Tension releases. Your mind clears. If you keep it up for a few minutes, you might notice your heart slowing and your muscles loosening up. A slow, conscious breath relaxes your mind and body at the same time, thus refreshing your spirit. Ever performed a speech or a piece of music and felt unbearably nerve-shaken beforehand? Next time, try breathing very slowly. This physically slows down your heart rate, soothing your restless worries. There's a reason for the classic instructions to stop and

take a deep breath when you feel angry. The breath frees the mind from the overpowering clouds of frustration and anger. When we take a moment to breathe, we allow the light of perspective to shine through our clouds of insatiable anger or sadness.

We always breathe — every second of every day, as long as we live, but unlike our body's other automatic functions (like the heartbeat or stomach digestion), we can control the breath. We can take quick, piercing breaths or slow, full breaths. Or we can let our breath fade into the background and do its own thing. But by attending to the breath and manipulating it, we can utilize it to relax our mental and emotional states of mind.

By delving deep into Yogic breathing techniques — also called pranayama — you can actually start to transform yourself over time. Sudarshan Kriya, also known as the "healing breath," is a technique taught during part of the Art of Living course offered at Truman. Sudarshan Kriya incorporates spe-

cific natural breath rhythms, each one corresponding to a different emotion. Used correctly, you can shed negative mental scars and release huge amounts of stress with this technique. You emerge feeling fresh and renewed. Although it's hard to believe such extraordinary results can stem from sitting and breathing, I speak from experience when I say it works. I always surface from Kriya feeling as if I have shed a few pounds of worry and stress.

Lloyd Pflueger, professor of philosophy and religion, offers the Art of Living course every semester, and the next one is Feb. 19 to 22. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, an Indian spiritual leader and activist, founded the Art of Living Foundation in Bangalore in 1981. Shankar has transferred his extensive amount of personal growth knowledge to teachers all across the country who host a variety of transformative courses through the Art of Living foundation. Now, instead of trying to make time to head to an ashram

for years to gain knowledge from a guru, you can simply take a weekend out of your life right now and learn some ancient techniques to mentally and physically energize and de-stress while connecting to deep levels of your being. You learn practical knowledge to remove your current stressors and prevent future stress.

The idea is that when you shed stress through the techniques taught in the course, you gain peace and contentment. From my perspective, I found peace and contentment surfaced naturally when I relaxed and let go of my frustrations. This taught me that I don't always have to stress out ensuring my life circumstances are at optimum happiness potential: impeccably perfect and safe so that, consequently, I could be happy. Happiness is right here, right now, in every moment — if only we slow down and relax long enough to notice it. Contentment doesn't depend upon the external world. It doesn't simply expand or contract depending on how much



homework you have, how much you think people like you or how broke you are. I quote Sri Sri Ravi Shankar: "Peace and contentment ... are our very nature, to be nurtured and encouraged."

If you are interested in attending the Art of Living course, come to an interest meeting at 7 p.m. today or Feb. 16 in McClain Hall 209. The four sessions in the course are scheduled as follows: 7 to 10 p.m. Feb. 19, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Feb. 20 and 21 and 6 to 10 p.m. Feb. 22. I highly recommend you consider attending. The course offers a unique opportunity to uncover culprits like anxiety, frustration, insecurity and weariness. I can pretty much guarantee that you will emerge feeling renewed, energized and peaceful.