

## Don't worry about corrupting the innocent freshmen



**Holly Fisher**

The corruption of college freshmen is a rampant issue at universities everywhere, a true crime against humanity on par with Godzilla and the impending zombie apocalypse.

By now, many Truman State freshmen have been introduced to the world beyond their hometowns. They have been free of parental censorship and explicit moral guidance for more than a semester, and if their experiences were anything like mine or the hundreds of other students I know, their moral compass has shifted a little bit.

Honestly, though, is it really fair to say we've all been corrupted?

I hear it all the time. "Holly, stop corrupting the freshmen," and "Holly, why are you corrupting the freshmen again?" I impart simple words of wisdom, advice based on what I've learned throughout the years about classes and professors, helpful tips and tricks for getting homework done, etc. Nothing is illegal or dirty or anything of the sort, but still, people reprimand me. When the freshmen first enter college, we act as though there is something sacred about them that needs to be preserved, but the primary purpose of attending college is often, in fact, to reach out beyond the horizon and discover new ways of thinking.

Parents tend to worry their child will fall into the sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll crowd the second their child heads off for college. They close their eyes, hand their innocent babes to the wolves and pray to whatever higher power will listen. Most freshmen, however, aren't very innocent in the first place.

Innocence is by and large a social construct, associated with concepts such as childhood and virginity. But many children have the capacity to comprehend and react to adult situations. Virgins can have some of the dirtiest minds thanks to the Internet. The only way to be truly "innocent" is through hardcore ignorance.

## Gray areas are crucial middle ground



**Will Chaney**

"I didn't get any sleep last night."  
"Sodexo food is the worst."  
"Barnett Hall is a freezer."

There is a good chance you have heard some of these expressions around campus. Although these sentences seem to have nothing in common, they all contain the same flaw — an "all or nothing" mentality. Black and white thinking — or "splitting," as it is called in the field of psychology — is a dangerous linguistic trap that can impact our lives in more ways than we often are aware of. Thinking of the world in extremist terms downplays the gray areas and fails to properly reflect reality.

The English language has more words for describing extremes than it does for the middle ground. What is the middle ground between good and bad, up and down, or beautiful and ugly? When we discuss gray areas, it often is in vague or general terms such as moderately good or the center, which makes the language less precise. Coming up with a word or phrase that actually describes a situation requires more effort and, in many cases, requires the speaker to step outside social norms. When someone asks, "How are you today?" the expectation usually is to respond with "Good," or another polarizing word that oversimplifies how the day actually is going.

One downside to black and white thinking is an increase in stress. When people use oversimplified ideas to think about their homework load, their personal relationships, a negative event that just occurred and so on, the natural tendency is to rush to extremes. A person could perceive the amount of homework they have as requiring an all-nighter or as something that can be done quickly the next morning just before class. While there are cases when an extremes actually is true, most of the time reality resides in the gray area. There are consequences to thinking the extreme is true when the reality is gray — in the homework example, the person might decide to procrastinate when more work is necessary or ditch their

The concept of corruption runs the same road as innocence, which means we really have to stop and ask what people mean when they say someone is corrupting freshmen. Most often, they're referring to the wicked ways of the world and the exposure to worldly temptations. On a college campus, however, the exchange of information and ideas is not only expected, it's valued. The free flow of information and ideas — a vital process in the pursuit of higher learning — naturally is going to include the good and the bad. There are two sides to any coin, and when talking about the world at large, you really need to address both sides lest we stunt intellectual growth.

The "corruption" of freshmen really comes into play when the students begin to re-evaluate their own position in life based on all those new ideas they've encountered. But, I argue we technically re-evaluate our positions all the time based on new information we receive, not just at college. We determine whether or not we believe the information, decide how it personally affects us and act accordingly. The new information and worldviews we learned as freshmen often were vastly different from what we were exposed to in our controlled home environments. Therefore the changes were much more dramatic.

Corruption also has a lot to do with what moral standard people are being judged by. A particularly conservative person, for example, might find the thought of premarital sex appalling, but on the flip side, there is the opinion the occasional safe sexual encounter is a healthy physical activity. Therefore, when someone decides to participate in such an act, the level of their "corruption" is completely subjective. If there is no objective standard to judge people by, then there really is no way to say certain people are becoming more corrupt than others.

Life as a college freshman is an exceptional experience where students really have the opportunity to figure out who they are and where they fit into the world. Being exposed to the world does not corrupt them, but rather broadens their horizons and turns them into more well-rounded individuals. The world can be much more beautiful than it is dangerous if only we allow it to be.

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friends when they don't have to. Choosing either of these options causes preventable stress, low grades and strained friendships.

Additionally, acting on black and white impulses is often very irrational because the imagined reality is distorted. One example of this is thinking in racist terms, where the world becomes oversimplified and based on arbitrary differences in appearance. The thought that one group of people is better or worse than another group because of ethnic differences is supported by assumptions or isolated experiences that are used to represent all experiences. To argue, as one political figure notably has, that one race produces more rapists, murderers and drug dealers than other races creates a fantasy detached from reality. This claim is built on the idea that one race is inherently bad without examining the complexities of social, political, economic and cultural forces that provide more detailed explanations. Thinking in such extreme terms is very easy, but it is a trap one should look out for.

By breaking out of the cycle of black and white thinking, we overcome simplifications and see the world as the complicated place it is. People who acknowledge the gray areas are more flexible, easier to work with and more likely to listen to a variety of different perspectives. Anyone, or nearly anyone, who thinks in oversimplified terms can begin to notice where their own thoughts are reduced to polarized extremes.

You have to ask yourself if you are using words that match the actual experience. Are you really never going to get your homework finished? Is that mixtape really the best? Is Sodexo really the worst? Sometimes an all or nothing mentality is accurate, but it should be questioned. It is also important to examine the ideas of other people, especially when they are influential or powerful, and question their simplifications. Reality is usually too complicated to look at with such extreme thoughts — you can't just build a wall to solve every problem.

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### If you could say one thing to President Troy Paino, what would it be?



**Clifton Kreps**  
Classics professor

Thanks. I wish you well.



**Mary Shapiro**  
Linguistics professor,  
Blueprint Team  
Co-Chair

I've never known an administrator that's not only so well known by the students but also so well loved by the students. That's going to be very difficult to replicate. We were lucky to have him for the time that we did.



**Molly Turner**  
Senior,  
Student Body  
President

Thank you for unquestionably promoting character, intellect, and dignity by bringing happiness and life to our campus through your sincere heart and servant leadership.



**Jonathan Vieker**  
Academic adviser,  
Staff Council Chair

While I'm sad to see you go, I'm also grateful for your dynamic, forward-thinking leadership these last six years. Thank you for leading boldly and with passion, and I wish you all the best at the University of Mary Washington!



**Karen Vittengl**  
Psychology professor,  
Blueprint Team  
Co-Chair

Thanks for your leadership of Truman. We will miss you, but wish you well with your new position.

*Editor's Note: With the exception of Clifton Kreps, all responses were submitted electronically.*