



staff photos by Diana Sultenfuss

# Students scribble for various reasons

by Ruth Wedergren  
Battalion Reporter

Most of us have seen our share of graffiti on the walls of high school restrooms and other places. Things like "Sue loves Joe 4-ever" are fairly common, as are some not-so-sweet things.

But graffiti is not restricted to restrooms, and the people who write it are not always lovesick teenagers. The reasons people write graffiti are as varied as what is written.

"Most people who write graffiti have mild frustrations," said Dr. Brian Stagner, an assistant professor of psychology at Texas A&M. "It's an anonymous way to be angry."

Dr. John Riskind, also an assistant professor of psychology, said, "It can be a way for people to express fantasies they can't act out. That may be the reason for a lot of sexual graffiti."

Stagner said that sometimes graffiti is prompted by sheer boredom. He remembered a library in Amherst, Mass. whose stairwell walls were covered with graffiti written because of boredom.

"The stairs were in enclosed shafts and were very dull," Stagner said. "Someone put quotes from 'Star Trek' every few steps on every floor as if to say, 'We've got to be in this building so let's make it more interesting.'"

Dr. Jon P. Alston, an assistant professor of sociology, said graffiti may be an effort to make a public place more human. "It's a way of making your environment more personal."

Riskind said graffiti also can be a substitute activity for those who can't easily express themselves to others. A person may be seeking recognition and attention through graffiti, even though it is anonymous.

"Some people want to leave a trace — they need to be remembered," he said, "and graffiti is a way to get recognition. It's also a way of testing one's ideas and thoughts. Because it's anonymous, it's a safe form of approval."

Riskind also said that along with allowing recognition, writing graffiti gives a person a sense of control and a way of marking his territory.

In speculating about specific types of people who write graffiti, he said, "I think a bored, frustrated person is more likely to write graffiti than a satisfied person. Satisfied people would find that a low choice of action."

Riskind said an inhibited person would be less likely to express something through graffiti than an impulsive person.

As for Freudian interpretations of graffiti, Stagner said, "I think Freud would wonder, 'What was the meaning for the actor? Was it out of a creative need or out of rage?'"

Grffiti is not a new form of expression.

"Walls dug-up from the ancient city of Pompeii are full of graffiti. We've had graffiti as long as we've had writing," Alston said.

Egyptians probably got frustrated and bored, too.

