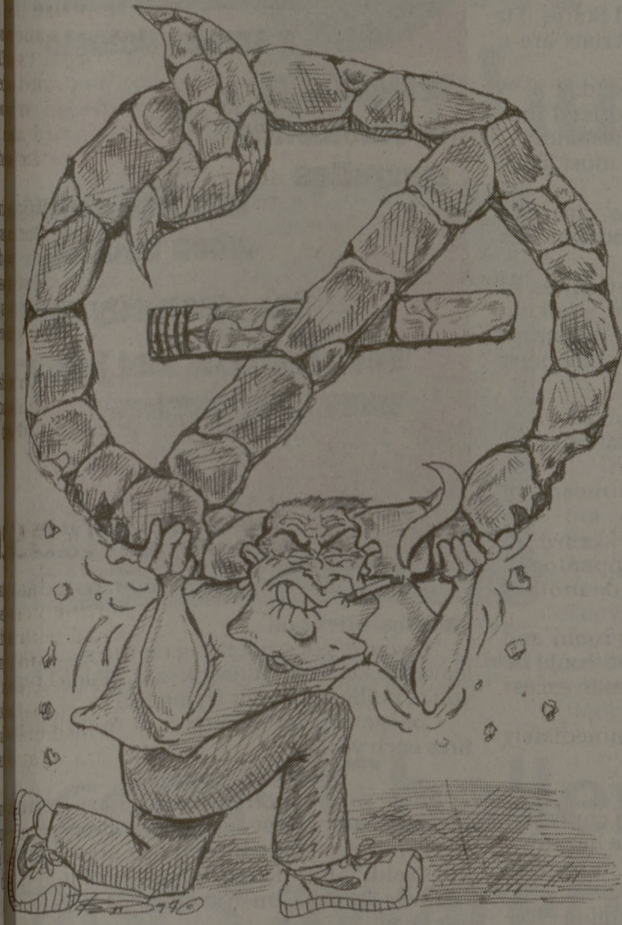


## Smokers unfairly punished by taxation



The 1990s have left us with few groups to oppress. Racism is out of vogue, but in a country where tolerance is becoming mainstream, there is still one group socially acceptable to bully: smokers.

Columnist



John Lemons  
Engineering  
Graduate Student

At least Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles says so. Chiles is proposing a 10-cent per-pack increase in Florida's cigarette tax. The potential \$121 million raised would fund programs to prevent children from smoking, treat drug abusers and emotionally disturbed children and establish a state ad campaign. These are noble causes, but targeting smokers to pay for them is a blatant act of discrimination. Chiles' move is evidence of society's view of smokers — as modern-day lepers. Here at Texas A&M University, sororities have placed limitations on smoking. Sara Crum, president of Delta Delta Delta, explained her sorority chapter's smoking policy. "Our members are not allowed to smoke in their letters," Crum said. "When you have your letters on, you're advertising Tri-Delt."

However, Crum elaborated that the smoking restrictions only affect members wearing sorority paraphernalia. "We're not allowed to tell girls that they can't smoke if they're legally able to," she said.

Sororities who ban members from smoking in their letters cross the line into a smoker's personal decisions. This action tells smokers they are not welcome in sororities. It is inappropriate for a student group to control members' personal behaviors based on its own biases.

Smokers sacrifice for their habit. On campus, they are relegated to smoking outside. For college students, the financial drain created by a pack-a-day habit is significant.

Trey Janesen, a freshman kinesiology major, admitted buying cigarettes is a financial priority. "You're driving down the street and you're on empty and out of cigarettes. So you get cigarettes and don't drive anymore," he said.

Kari Parfait, a freshman general studies major, said smoking is more important than eating for some people.

"I was at Wal-Mart and I asked the checker to subtotal my groceries to see if I could afford my carton of

cigarettes," she said.

College students are notoriously poor. If a 10-cents per-pack increase was added to Texas' cigarette tax, the results could be a population of emaciated college smokers.

Are you prepared to pass huddled masses of smokers holding signs reading "Will Work for Cigarettes" on your way to class?

Perhaps smokers are a different breed of person. Since James Dean lit up in *Rebel Without a Cause*, smoking has been identified with rebellion. Brian Heien, a sophomore engineering technology major, commented on the difference between smokers and non-smokers.

"I stereotype people who smoke," he said. "I think they are more open-minded."

Jana Dunn, a freshman psychology major, said smokers are more morbid than the general population.

"I think the discussions we [smokers] have often have to do with death," said Dunn. "There's a correlation in our minds between our smoking and our death."

Outcasts, rebels and non-conformists. Each of these images sets smokers apart from society, making them easy targets.

There are actions the University can take to help smokers with their image problem. A lack of ashtrays in areas where smokers congregate re-

sults in smokers tossing their cigarette butts on the ground. Hundreds of cigarette butts litter the courtyard around the Engineering/Physics building because there is not an ashtray in sight. (After all, everybody knows those physicists are chain-smokers.) Smokers can't even throw butts away in trash cans, because they risk starting a fire.

Sven Mesecke, a senior accounting and finance major, regrets dumping butts on the ground.

"Anytime you throw a cigarette butt on the ground, somebody's going to see you do it and think, 'what a jerk,'" he said.

By strategically placing ashtrays around campus, the University can keep the campus clean and help smokers.

Americans have the right to make unhealthy choices for themselves without being coerced by the government or student organizations.

Adults who are aware of the health hazards of smoking and do not infringe on the rights of non-smokers should be able to practice their habit without being badgered. When we learn to separate our distaste for smoking from those who smoke, we'll all be able to breathe a little easier.

## Knowledge, precautions aide in defeating stalking

Stalking is a moronic and sick practice which has plagued our campus for many years. One stalker, whose picture adorns the campus, has been making death threats with no apparent motive.

For the victims, it is a part of their lives which is hard to ignore. Fear, anxiety and anger distract them everyday. But there is hope. With the help of the right resources, victims can live normal lives and stalkers can get help.

A friend of mine, who has been stalked by two different people in the last year, said being stalked made her constantly paranoid and much more cautious. "It made me a lot more careful because my stalker found out everything about me from overhearing a conversation I had in a club," she said. "People should be careful

Columnist



David Boldt  
Senior  
Marketing major

of what they tell strangers about themselves."

Unfortunately, most stalkers aren't strangers. Detective Wade Williams of the University Police Department said, "Most of them [stalkers] are ex-boyfriends who simply can't let go."

Somehow, these meathheads think if they follow girls around, leave notes on their cars, and hide naked in the bushes, the girl will want to take them back.

Most girls just want to get as far away from these freaks as possible. Unfortunately, this only encourages the stalker to do it more.

There are ways, however, to stop the cycle. Sgt. Betty LeMay of the University Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit said there are several ways a

stalking victim can remain safe.

"People should be aware of what's around them at all times," she said. "Remember your personal space... and don't let a stranger get into it."

There are times when contact with a stalker can't be avoided. If the stalker calls and you answer the phone, or he surprises you with an unexpected visit, it's not always easy to get out of the situation.

The common reaction is to be nice to the stalker to get out of the situation. This will only make the situation worse, once again giving the stalker encouragement to continue trying to enter your life.

"If you encounter the stalker in person, don't be nice to them. Don't encourage it. Let the person know that this is against the law and tell them to leave you alone," LeMay said. "If you are in a car, drive to the police station."

The key is to get to safety as soon as possible while letting the stalker know

you mean business.

Safety, however, sometimes requires more drastic measures, as stalking victims are often physically hurt and even sometimes killed.

Arming oneself with a gun is possible with a concealed handgun permit, but obtaining one takes time and carrying a gun wherever you go is often difficult. There is an alternative solution.

"Pepper spray is very effective," LeMay said. "But you must have it with you, where it is easily accessible."

Many of us know what it feels like to be dumped by someone you cared for. Sometimes it hurts so bad you never want to date again.

However, stalking cannot be an option. You've got to take the pain and move on with your life.

Stalkers usually start as normal people, but when they let their fantasies turn into an obsession, it controls their ac-

tions and they become disturbed individuals. These people are societal scum who have nothing better to do than instill fear and paranoia in an innocent victim. Many of them may not even realize they are stalkers. Often, as in alcoholism, the problem is not thought to be serious until it's too late.

Stalkers of any degree need professional help.

If you are stalker, or think you may be one, go to Student Counseling Services in Henderson Hall and put an end to it. If you are the victim of a stalker, don't be afraid to report it. Lean on your friends for support and seek out the police for help. Sgt. LeMay and other officers at the University Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit can be reached for advice at 845-8900.

With a little determination and courage, stalking can be stopped.

## Conformity obstructs capability, neutralizes students' talents

A few years ago, one of my English professors discussed the "herding technique" implementation on college campuses. He joked how universities

around the country strive to mold students into the status quo. "Often times the campus environment is so controlled it stifles creativity instead of fostering imagination."

Administrators at most universities, including Texas A&M, often seem to discourage students from taking a stand or acting outside an arbitrary set of rules. College students should have the opportunity to learn through experimentation and possible failure.

How often have students pursued a wonderful idea, only to stop when someone said it shouldn't be done? More times than we'd like to admit.

When a group of Aggies decided to circulate a petition calling for a student referendum, people told them it couldn't be done. Despite the predictions, over 5,000 signatures have been collected. This proves it can be done.

If these students had given up the face of opposition, nothing could have changed. However, they were willing to go out and prove the cynics wrong. Unless the Judicial Board disqualifies hundreds of signatures, these

students will have forced the first student referendum at A&M.

I was reminded of this last week when I met Stan Ridgely, who has become a legend on the Duke University campus.

Several years ago, Stan founded a campus newspaper and fought several legal battles with Duke University. Even though Ridgely is a celebrated figure and his newspaper, the *Duke Review*, is now distributed around the country, he wishes he had made a bigger impact on the university.

"I wish I were an undergraduate again, just for one year," he said.

Ridgely told me he spent most of his college career trying not to make waves or upset university officials. During his senior year, he realized how much liberty he really had. Duke officials told him how to publish his paper, where to distribute it and what to print. By the time he learned those rules could not be enforced and held no consequences, he had already wasted several years abiding by the constricting regulations.

Some students have overcome the constraints imposed on them. The students who initiated the yell leader petition and the first non-regs to run for yell leader had to fight against tremendous odds. By challenging themselves to do what was labeled impossible, they attained goals no one expected.

Of course, we need rules, and there is great strength in unity and conformity. However, there is a time when leadership and innovation are necessary.

This is why Aggies have been such valuable members of the armed forces throughout history.

While former Corps members can take orders, they can also make decisions and take control of a situation when necessary. While others wait for someone to take charge, Aggies have been able to recognize when a situation calls for leadership, and then provide it.

A university should foster these leadership skills as well as academic capability.

On the A&M campus, we are subject to various laws, but University officials have created even more regulations in an attempt to maintain a proper learning environment.

Student organizations on campus must abide by a long list of rules. The University requests a list of all club members, organization's flyers must meet several guidelines, and any fund-raising letter must be submitted to University officials before being mailed. These are only a few of the regulations filling five manuals issued to every student organization. Any organization not complying with these guidelines is subject to fines, loss of privileges or suspension.

These rules may be overwhelming, but students should not be discouraged by them.

Students should evaluate their beliefs and decide if and when they will stand for something.

I'm not advocating civil disobedience. I would never suggest a student revolution either. I am encouraging personal initiative. Find something you believe in, create a goal to improve an aspect of campus you care about and don't let pessimists discourage you.



### MAIL CALL

#### Conformity clouds Free thought issue

Regarding Chris Sneller's Feb. 4 Mail Call letter

I have nothing but praise for Sneller and his/her supporters for rejecting the prevailing view in society that there is no objective truth. However, they have unfortunately not completely escaped the trap of conformity, which Paul warns against in Romans 12:2. In our society we are constantly

bombarded with the assertion that we should all be "free thinkers," which Sneller seems to like, assuming that this will eventually lead us to Christ. The Bible, on the other hand, never speaks of free thought, and in fact it warns us not to trust in "what seems right to man." (Prov. 14:12).

Was Eve participating in free thought when she "saw that the fruit was good for food?" If we make our decision on whether or not to accept Christ based on evidence or our reasoning, we have already rejected Him.

Jason Knott  
Class of '00

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or fewer and include the author's name, class, and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

The Battalion - Mail Call  
013 Reed McDonald  
Texas A&M University  
College Station, TX  
77843-1111

Campus Mail: 1111  
Fax: (409) 845-2647  
Email: Batt@tamvm1.tamu.edu