

Professor studies stereotypes

Colleen Pohlig
Oregon Daily Emerald

As a Jewish-American child, psychology Professor Myron Rothbart saw the devastated looks on the faces of two concentration camp survivors his family temporarily housed following World War II.

This could be one reason Rothbart has spent 20 years at the University researching intergroup relations, particularly how and why people form stereotypes.

With the help of undergraduate and graduate students, Rothbart has completed numerous studies on topics including the apparent automatic mechanisms to exclude some groups of people and the tendency to overaccrue certain ideas people have of groups.

In many studies, Rothbart found stereotypes are typically oversimplified. For example, he said, if fraternity men tend to be a little boisterous or not very academic, people "overshoot" and perceive all fraternity men to be very boisterous.

Additionally, people don't see much variability within the group, he said.

"So we make two kinds of errors: we see [groups] as stereotypically more extreme than they really are; we also see them as much more homogeneous than they really are," he said.

However, he said, the mind has ways of isolating individuals who are part of a group but who may not fit the group stereotypes. People tend to dismiss these individuals as "exceptions."

"So the fraternity guy who appears to be very serious, shy and poetic — you just sort of throw him out," he said. "It's as if, psychologically speaking, he's not really thought of as a member of the category."

This mechanism allows people to maintain extreme images or stereotypes of certain groups, he said.

Although no single factor influences the formation of stereotypes, sufficient evidence supports the theory that this mechanism is automatic, he said.

A shift in social atmosphere can change certain stereotypes, he said, such as the dissolution of hatred for communist China after former President Richard Nixon visited the country in the early 1970s.

Another stereotype change occurs through individual contact with members of a group. For that change to be most effective, the member of the group must disprove the stereotype, but still be thought of as a member of the group, he said.

For example, a sorority woman who fits the typical stereotype but is "initiating a hunger strike in South Africa to end apartheid,"



Madonna Moss researches artifacts with her husband. GARY GRASS/Emerald

ARTIFACTS

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of elevating their status for protection.

"These sites are not just important to Oregon but also important to the pre-history of North America," she said.

Moss said she hopes to propose about 100 of the sites for the national register.

The research is funded by federal monies granted through the state's Historic Preservation office. The two received roughly \$20,000 a year to pay for mileage, food and the cost of radiocarbon dating of samples, but donated their time and labor.

University graduate students Mark Tveskov and Scott Byram also worked in the research process. George Wasson, a member of the Coquille

Indian tribe, served as a liaison with tribal members who were involved in the recording of the sites.

The pieces of charred shells discovered were part of a "shell midden" or an area for refuse. Moss said the pieces were just remnants that would go unnoticed to the untrained eye.

Moss and Erlandson also found pebble tools used for heavy work and pieces of obsidian or a sharp, black volcanic rock originating from south-central Oregon and Northwest California.

The artifacts were not found during an archeological dig but rather near the surface, close to bedrock. Moss said the area was heavily exposed to wind, which probably blew the soil from underneath the artifacts.

may change someone's preconceived notions of sororities.

Most of Rothbart's research is published in psychological journals which are read by teachers and shared in classrooms worldwide.

Rothbart's research inspired graduate student Mara Cadinu to leave Italy and study under Rothbart. He is "one of the top people in the world" who research intergroup relations and stereotypes, Cadinu said.

Since 1969, he has won several awards for his research. He received the Message for Extending Research in Time award and was honored by the National Institute of Mental Health. He is a Woodrow Wilson fellow and is a former associate editor of the renowned Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

Through his research, Rothbart said he hopes to stimulate change in people's formation of stereotypes.

"I hope people can realize their sources of error in their thinking about groups," Rothbart said.

RESEARCH

This is the third story in a five-part series on research at the University, the people who make the breakthroughs and how they do it.

■ **MONDAY:** A look at the University's research program

■ **TUESDAY:** A look at research funding and how faculty get it

■ **TODAY:** A feature of the great discoveries made by University faculty

■ **THURSDAY:** A look at the Oregon Research Survey Labs

■ **FRIDAY:** A feature of the summer research program for faculty

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Emerald will continue to feature the great discoveries made on this campus throughout the rest of this week.

ily think of themselves as Chinese," he said. "Ethnically and racially they are Chinese."

The United States and the United Nations, however, recognize Taiwan as a province of mainland China.

The Taiwanese Student Organization, which was approved Jan. 17 by the ASUO, resents the idea of lumping people from Taiwan and mainland China together, said Shing-Jye Chen, TSO president.

"While some Taiwanese may have Chinese ancestry and some Taiwanese culture may be rooted in China, couldn't the same be said of the United States?" Chen asked in a recent letter.

The CSA was formed in 1977, during an era when students from mainland China were forbidden to study in the United States, Hsiah said.

The CSSU wasn't started until the late 1980s, according to Lu.

CULTURE

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Cultural groups usually don't get caught up in politics, according to a student familiar with both groups who spoke on condition of anonymity. "But for those groups, there is a lot of political tension," the student said.

Much of the friction between the groups stems from a civil war in China, which has never officially ended, said Richard Suttmeier, University political science professor.

In 1949, after heavy fighting with communist forces in China, the Chinese nationalist government faction fled to Taiwan, he said. The nationalists established their own government and became an important factor in the international economy.

"Nationally and politically they don't necessar-

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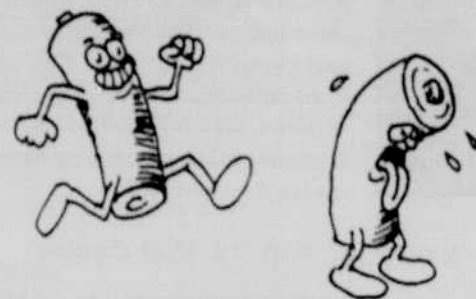
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