



Catch up
with P.J.
See Sidelines

oregon daily

GOLDEN SQUARE
INFORMATION BOOTH
683-8100

emerald

Wednesday, June 5, 1985

Eugene, Oregon

Volume 86, Number 168

Researchers question cult techniques

By Michael Duncan
Of the Emerald

Some extremist religious sects and a number of related self-help therapies employ communication techniques that may over time "alter or impair fundamental information-processing abilities" and may result in severe physical, emotional and mental disorders, a team of University researchers announced at a press conference Tuesday.

Authors and research associates Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman released a study titled "Information Disease," presenting findings of a nationwide study on the effects of covert induction and deprogramming.

These results are the culmination of four years of research by the authors, based on the experiences of more than 400 former members of five major cults and religious sects, and one year of data analysis at the University Communication Research Center.

The sects using purported mind-control techniques include the Church of Scientology, the Unification Church, the Hare Krishna sect, the Devine Light Mission and The Way International. Also included are numerous smaller sects derived from Eastern religions and extreme fundamentalist Christianity.

The researchers described more than 20 disorders that they say appear to be related to the extended practice of

techniques including chanting, meditation, group-dynamics practices and other intense communication rituals.

Reported symptoms include disorientation, nightmares, amnesia, delusions, hallucinations, recurring mental images and an inability to make decisions.

Conway and Siegelman reserve the term "cult" for those groups using identifiable communication techniques in a process that they refer to as "covert induction," which is the use of indirect hypnosis induced without the individual's awareness or consent.

"This is not a debate of religious freedom," Siegelman said. "We're looking at this phenomenon from a mental health point of view. The significant physical, mental and emotional effects are not a result of the beliefs but (result) from the mind-stilling techniques that most of these groups use as part of their daily ritual practices.

"And it is our concern that when people engage in these rituals, they can become extremely vulnerable to suggestion," he added. "And that is the core of the kind of process that might bring people into these groups and have them saying and doing things that might very much conflict with their own freedom of thought.

"This is the first time we've ever seen people being drawn, very often through forms of misrepresentation and decep-

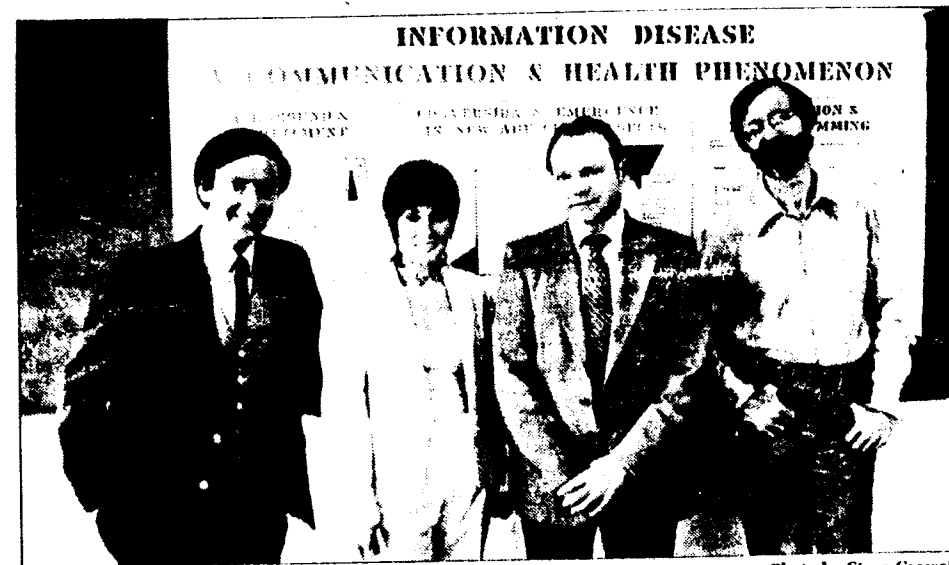


Photo by Steve Crowell

Researchers James Siegelman and Flo Conway, speech Professor Carl Carmichael, and speech GTF John Coggins release the findings of a five-year study on religious cult communication techniques.

tion, into techniques and rituals of which they are not informed," Siegelman said.

"Our hypothesis is that there are neuro-physiological effects as a result of the communication techniques," Siegelman said.

In question is intention, and this report may have importance in the legal

implications of recruitment activities by group organizers.

"Intent is always the most serious question," Siegelman said. "And there is no way that we can determine what the organizers are aware of. But with some of these groups it seems clear that the leaders have a great deal of knowledge of how the human mind BEHAVES."