

Why do people believe in UFOs? Sagan: Scientific illiteracy

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TUKWILA, Wash. (AP) — So you believe earth has been visited by unidentified flying objects and the evidence has been suppressed by the government?

That hypnosis or psychotherapy can enable you to recover memories from before you were born?

That creatures from outer space regularly abduct humans, subject them to sexual abuse and use them for breeding experiments with aliens?

Well, you have plenty of company, and that makes you a part of one of the biggest problems in the world of science, astronomer Carl Sagan and other debunkers of pseudoscientific misconceptions said Friday.

"It's not that we're grumpy about lost continents or UFOs," Sagan said — it's that the world can ill afford such scientific illiteracy.

Surveys indicate 25 percent to 50 percent of adult U.S. citizens "don't know the earth goes around the sun once a year," Sagan said.

"Almost every newspaper in the United states

has an astrology column ... and none has a daily science column. Some have a weekly science column. Why is that?" he asked. "When is the last time you heard an intelligent remark on science from a president of the United States?"

Most of the 740 people attending the convention are psychologists, said Paul Kurtz, chairman and founder of the committee, based in Buffalo, N.Y.

Thursday, there was a debate between John Mack, a Harvard psychiatrist who believes about 90 of his patients have been abducted and molested by space aliens, and Donna Bassett, a journalist from North Carolina who convinced Mack she was an abductee and then wrote about her "treatment."

Mack said his patients' stories were so frequent, convincing and similar, there must be something to them.

"All other cultures allow other beings, other realities, other dimensions," Mack said.

But Bassett said Mack's research was disturbingly uncritical.

"There was no scientific method whatsoever," she said.