

Accessibility & Inclusivity in the Astronomical Community

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The problem

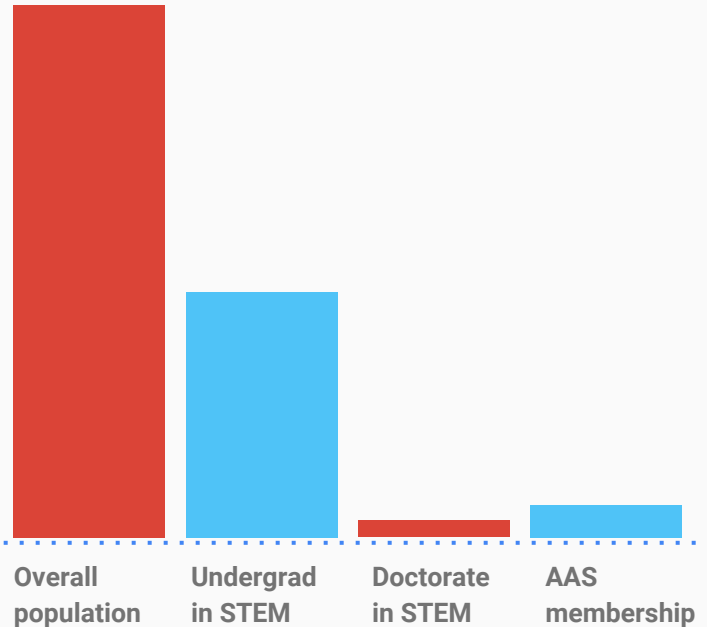
19% of Americans are disabled, half that severely so.

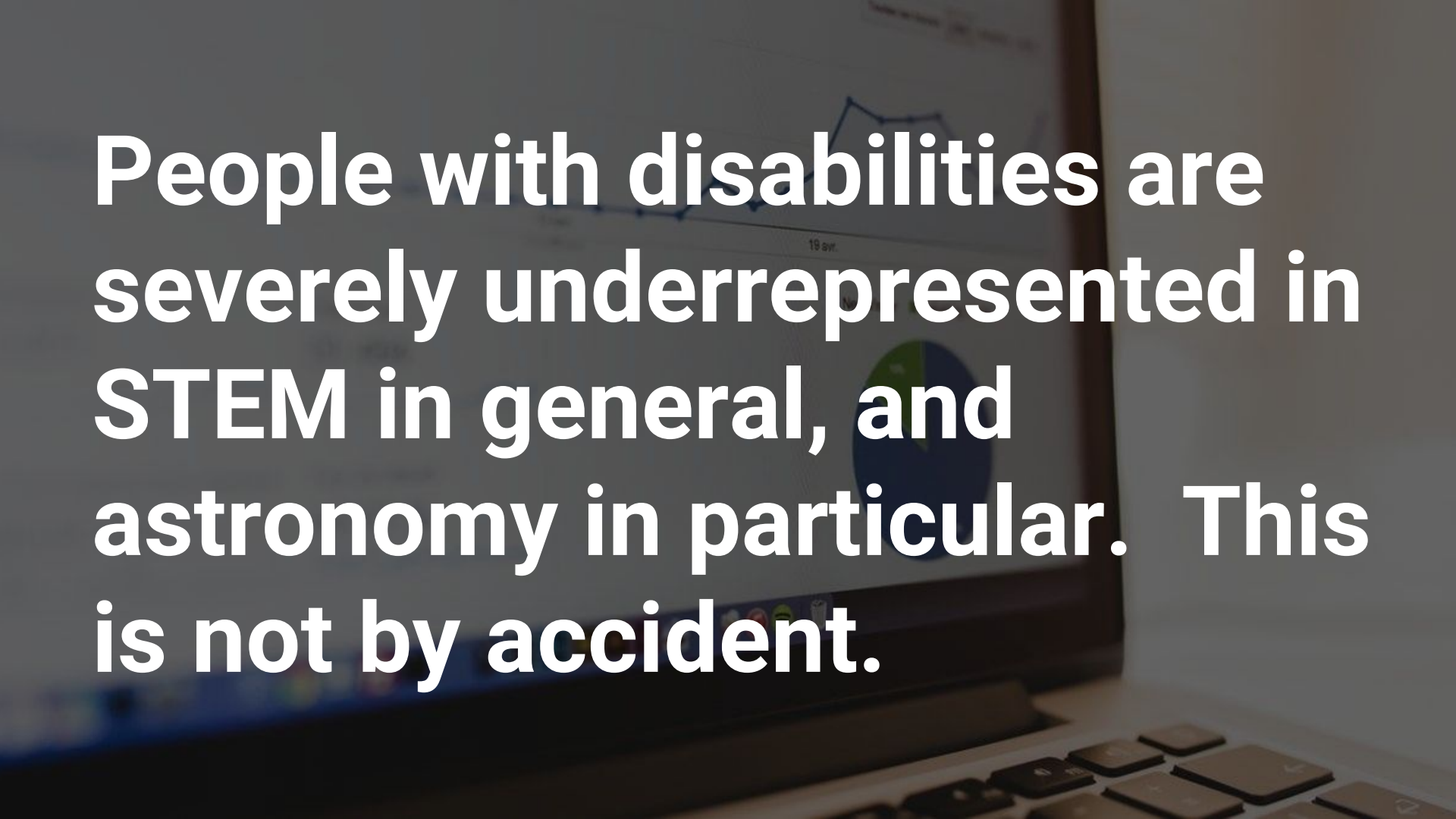
1 in 4 Americans has a mental illness.

<2% of AAS members in a 2013 survey identified themselves as disabled.

Less than 10% of STEM undergraduate students are disabled.

Less than 1% of STEM doctoral students are disabled.



A laptop screen is shown in the background, displaying a line graph with a blue line and a globe. The text is overlaid on the screen in a large, white, bold font. The text reads: "People with disabilities are severely underrepresented in STEM in general, and astronomy in particular. This is not by accident." The laptop keyboard is visible at the bottom of the frame.

People with disabilities are severely underrepresented in STEM in general, and astronomy in particular. This is not by accident.

Discrimination
and
stigmatization
are still
common.

“But you don’t look disabled.”


“Accommodations are special treatment.”

“That would lower the standards of the class.”

“If you’re that sick, you shouldn’t be here.”

“You’re autistic? But you seem normal.”

“Well, we shouldn’t expect anyone like that [with learning disabilities] at our institution.”

A close-up photograph of a person's hands using a white cane. The person is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. Their right hand is holding the cane, and their left hand is resting on a light-colored surface. The background is blurred, showing some bokeh lights.

The Americans
with Disabilities
Act has existed
for 25 years, but
it alone is
insufficient.

We want to create a truly
accessible future for
everyone.

Disability and Access are social constructs

What is the “default” set of abilities and skills one needs to succeed in astronomy? Why?

If everyone found stairs difficult, we would have fewer of them - so using stairs [or any other access issue] is a social choice.

An aerial view of a city skyline at dusk or dawn. The sky is a mix of dark blues and oranges, with some clouds. The city below is densely packed with buildings, many of which have their lights on, creating a grid of small white and yellow dots. The text is overlaid in the upper half of the image.

We aspire to a way of working together that does not require disclosure of disability, and where diverse needs are being met with each of our interactions and activities.

A mindset of diverse access makes the experience of learning, working, and collaborating stronger for all.

**We've created the AAS Working Group on
Accessibility and Disability to address these
issues**

Intersectionality matters, and impacts access.

People with disabilities are often members of more than one marginalized group, so we are working with the Committee on the Status of Minorities in Astronomy, the Committee on the Status of Women in Astronomy, the Committee for Sexual-Orientation & Gender Minorities in Astronomy