

The Accessible Stall Podcast

Episode 33: Accessibility = Wheelchairs

Emily: Hi, I'm Emily Ladau

Kyle: And I'm Kyle Khachadurian

Emily: And you're listening to another episode of *The Accessible Stall*. What are we gonna talk about today, Kyle?

Kyle: Well actually, I just have a question for you, Emily

Emily: Yes sir?

Kyle: Why is wheelchair synonymous with disability?

Emily: I don't know. But there's a lot to unpack here

Kyle: That's like your catchphrase on this show

Emily: What? "That there's a lot to unpack here?"

Kyle: Yes. We should do a supercut of every time you said that

Emily: Oh, that's probably way too much. I think I got that from my time in college and every time we would read something a professor would say, "There's a lot to unpack here!" And then we'd have a philosophical, analytical conversation for an hour and thirty minutes.

Kyle: I see. Well it's a very like, leader-y thing to say. I just want you to do the thumb point thing that all politicians do, you know the stuff...you can't see me, but you know the politician hand gesture where they point with their thumb like that?

Emily: I don't think I've ever noticed this in my life.

Kyle: Oh, watch former President Obama give a speech!

Emily: I consider that the, "Obama Gesture" than the "All Politicians Gesture."

Kyle: Oh, it's not even a politician's, it's like a power...like a CEO does it too, it's just a thing that powerful people do for some reason.

Emily: I mean I definitely talk with my hands. I'm doing it right now, and you're the only one who can see me. But I don't think I have a power move.

Kyle: I don't know. You should, everyone needs a good power move.

Emily: Did you know? And this is super not on topic, but really quick, that apparently if you hold yourself in a powerful stance for a while it's supposed to change how you feel about yourself? Like, you're supposed to feel more confident. If you stand in like some Superwoman power pose?

Kyle: Let's test that. I'm gonna talk like this for the next minute and we're gonna see...

Emily: I'm going full Beyonce right now! Do you feel more confident about what you're saying?

Kyle: A little bit, I gotta tell ya.

Emily: It's the posture

Kyle: Um, anyway. I was just wondering, why are wheelchairs synonymous with disability? Can you confidently answer me in that pose?

Emily: Ugh, okay. Now I just have my hand on my head like a monkey so I don't feel so confident anymore. *(laughs)* Kyle's flexing both his muscles! Both his muscles, he only has two muscles.

Kyle: Yes, I do.

Emily: So the reason I said there's a lot to unpack is that I don't think that there's a straightforward answer as to why disability is synonymous with...uh, no! Why wheelchairs are synonymous with disability.

Kyle: Well I guess then I should ask you, I assumed you agreed with me.

Emily: I do absolutely agree with you. And I would go so far as to say that it's a really big problem, even though some people might consider this to be a nitpicky topic, I think it points to much deeper issues about our mentality as a society as a whole about disability. And then on top of that, how representation is perpetuating this particular connection between words that is accurate, but doesn't paint the whole picture.

Kyle: That's a very good point! So I guess, where do you start? I think for me, what started this conversation was just being alive for twenty-five years and being sick of everybody not believing I was disabled but if you look around I get it. I think the last time we tried to do this, no I *know* the last time we tried to do this I kept bringing up the International Symbol of Access, or as it's

more commonly known, “The Wheelchair Man.” Or the Handicapped Symbol, or The Accessible Symbol, you’ve all seen it, looks like a toilet...you know what it is!

(Emily chuckles)

Kyle: And how, I don’t think it’s intentioned to do anything but mark a spot for a disabled person, but between what it depicts and how it depicts it, mixed with the juxtaposition of, you know, those spots are generally fitted to wheelchairs. I don’t think it’s unreasonable for someone to assume that that symbol, although it is all encompassing for people with disabilities, I don’t think it’s unreasonable for the people who are looking at it to equate the two things in their head. I don’t think it should happen but I completely understand why it does.

Emily: It comes down to being recognizable. So, I really think that historically the media has painted a picture of disability equaling a wheelchair, or using some type of mobility device. And so, that is the first thing that pops into people’s heads likely because it’s the easiest visual representation of something. So like if you’re watching a movie or a TV show and there’s a disabled character, and they somehow want to acknowledge that the character has a disability without actually being like, “Here’s our disabled character!” They just stick him in a wheelchair.

Kyle: Well that would be bad storytelling anyway, but yeah, no you’re right! You’re right, you’re absolutely right. And... yeah, I guess when you’re particularly looking at someone and there’s no better tell...Because even with things like crutches it could just easily be, “Oh they sprained their ankle.” You know what I mean?

Emily: Well it depends what kind of crutches. That’s a technicality

Kyle: I understand, yeah. Yes, but unless you’re in a hospital, if you’re rolling around in a wheelchair then you’re probably disabled or very old. But those two things don’t look alike either so if you’re not very old, you’re probably disabled.

Emily: But if you’re just going for a joyride...

Kyle: But that’s...well...

Emily: I’m kidding! *(laughs)* But I think that it’s just super easy for people to go to the most graphic, super visual representation that they can think of in order to symbolize a much bigger word. Because really, how do you symbolize “Disability” in a word, or an image? And it needs to be an image to be universal, because if it’s a word it’s not the same in every language.

Kyle: Oh yeah and that’s the thing I was thinking about too, I don’t think that there’s a better way to do it, I really don’t. I think that a wheelchair’s actually the perfect way to do it, but I think an unintended side effect is that it fails to acknowledge that there are other kinds of disability in the world. And you know, it’s actually a part of the International Standards for Public Buildings

symbols so it's right up there with the Hospital Symbol and the Male and Female stick figures on bathrooms...

Emily: But those are so much more universal and granted, I'm not talking here about representations of gender. I do think gender neutral bathrooms should be a thing. But..

Kyle: Oh yeah they should...but that has nothing to do with the symbols. Gender neutral bathrooms should just exist everywhere.

Emily: But a picture of someone who is male identifying versus female identifying, you know that is so much more universal than just the wheelchair.

Kyle: I understand that, and I mean..You say that and I agree with you. But at the same time when you look at those symbols, it's not really a man and the only reason that the female is recognizable as such is because she's wearing a pointy dress.

Emily: Yeah

Kyle: So it's like... You know I mean like...And I get it, you have to boil down those symbols also and I completely understand that. But, I imagine that even though those are international standards they might cause confusion in places where for example, women don't wear dresses. Like if there's a cultural piece of clothing that they wear instead of dress where a woman here would wear a dress, for example. I have no idea. I'm just guessing here.

Emily: Oh no, I think that they are problematic and reductive but I think that all symbols by nature are reductive because you you're trying to represent a whole population with a symbol.

Kyle: And that's why I would say, I genuinely...I don't have a problem with it. I don't feel excluded, I don't feel left out. I just can't help but wonder if there's not a better way to do it because I think that that's part of why we as a people tend to think that disability equals wheelchairs, or wheelchairs equal disability or some such.

Emily: You mentioned the Hospital symbol? And that I'm pretty sure is just an "H." So you had me thinking just for a second, "Well wouldn't it be great if the symbol for 'Disability' was just a letter 'D'?" But A, that's completely like anglocentric and B, then people are gonna start saying, "Well I don't call myself disabled, I call myself physically challenged so I should be represented by a 'P'!"

Kyle: As far as being anglocentric you're right, but most international symbols are with English in mind because English is the lingua franca for like business and technology whether we like to admit it or not. So like, even if your word for "H"

(Emily laughs)

Kyle: Your word for H! Your word for “Hospital” in your native language doesn’t start with “H.” You know if I’d gotten all the way though that sentence I would have said, “If your word for ‘H’ doesn’t start with Hospital!”

(Emily laughs)

Kyle: Um...then you can still recognize that that “H” means hospital because i was designed in a place, or for a world who speaks English a little bit enough to know what that symbol means. But you’re still right. Um so, and that’s the other thing right? Like there are so many different ways to identify as disabled that if you sort of chopped it up into every discernible way to do it you’d end up with a semi-infinite amount of terminology, and at what point do you just say, “Screw this?” You know?

Emily: Yeah, and then the other problem too is you can take a sticker or a sign with the Accessibility icon, stick it anywhere you want, and that doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s fully accessible to everyone. So sometimes, it means that it’s not even fully accessible to a wheelchair user. So really sometimes it’s just nothing more than a useless symbol. And I’m not talking about compliance with the law here, I’m talking about sometimes something is just not going to be accessible to someone because someone’s needs do not exactly fit in with the standards of the law. Or, alternatively a place says they’re accessible, has the little symbol up, and then you go there and they have zero idea of what accessibility actually means and it’s a complete nightmare.

Kyle: Yeah. So I guess it really boils down to...”What good is it anyway?”

Emily: It’s all we have

Kyle: No, I know. And I realized after recording our failed episode about this the other night...

Emily: Oh yeah, we definitely recorded an entire episode about this, scrapped it, and then decided to have the entire conversation again! *(chuckles)*

Kyle: But here, I’m gonna quote Wikipedia. The wheelchair symbol is “International, and therefore not accompanied by Braille in any particular language.” And that’s because Braille doesn’t have a standard. Well, there is a standard but not everyone adheres to it. So that means that it would by necessity, have to be left out if it were to be adopted by an international standard, which it was. So in essence, the symbol for all disabilities isn’t accessible. And if that’s not irony I don’t know what is.

Emily: Well yeah, because it’s not tactile at all.

Kyle: Right. No, I...Well I mean, I don't know. Like what are you gonna do about that? That's sort of adding to why it's dumb. Like, that's why you shouldn't equate disability to one thing.

Emily: So I've seen a couple of attempts to sort of solve this problem by using the icon with some extra specifics to kind of get to the heart of it.

Kyle: Right, yes.

Emily: So, I know at one point the Mayor's Office, for people with disabilities had started something where they created red, yellow, and green stickers and they all had the Accessible icon on them, and it didn't take off. That's why you never heard about this. So, the red said "No" meaning, "No Access," the yellow said "Low" meaning somewhere in the middle, and the green said "Go" meaning like, "Yes this is a go." And I thought that was a good start to indicating your level of accessibility but, it first of all requires ownership to admit you're not fully accessible. Like, are you really gonna stick a sticker...

Kyle: What was it gonna be like, food grades? Like the food, restaurant grades?

Emily: Pretty much yeah like it was sort of a rudimentary version of that, and so are you really gonna want to put a sticker on your window that says, "No" with a Handicapped symbol on it?

Kyle: Well, you say that but then if it took off then maybe you could write it into law like, when the health inspector comes that you don't have a choice but to hang up your grade in the window, somewhere public so people can see.

Emily: Right, but then would that become widespread enough so as to be common knowledge? That that doesn't mean... "No disabled people allowed in here?" And it literally just means, "We can't accommodate you"

Kyle: Yeah, I think if there was a big enough push for it. Yeah, I think you would clear up that ambiguity very easily to be honest if you, for such a thing were to be adopted. You could just look that up in the same way you could look up what the food letter grades mean.

Emily: That's true. I mean to be honest, I very rarely look for food grades.

Kyle: I do. I don't eat at a place lower than a "B." I barely ever eat at a "B!" I absolutely do that, I do that all the time.

Emily: I only do that in like...Chinatown? *(laughs)*

Kyle: No, I do that. If your restaurant's a "B" I don't eat there. Unless I know you're good and I've eaten there before, like before I noticed.

Emily: (*laughs*) But anyway, so I know we're kind of analyzing the symbol in and of itself, but the larger implications are something worth talking about too and that's what started this conversation in the first place is, it's exclusionary. I don't think it's meant to be offensive by a long shot, at all.

Kyle: I don't think it is really. Well, the reason that I brought it up to you in the first place is, I don't really care that able bodied people do it. If your only exposure to disability at all is the occasional sick character on a TV show and this wheelchair symbol, of course that's what you're going to think. But I've seen us do it to each other! And that's what really bothers me is we should know better, we should be better at this...but we're not. We're just as guilty as everyone else.

Emily: I'm super guilty of it.

Kyle: Yeah me too, I'm not saying I'm above it just 'cause I had the thought. We all are.

Emily: But you know how I get in bathrooms.

Kyle: Oh boy. Do I ever.

Emily: I get so angry when someone is taking up an accessible stall, and just from looking at them, I assume they don't need it. You know, and if they brought in a suitcase, or if they were changing their clothes, or if they just wanted a little bit more room, or if every other stall is open and they took the big one for a little extra space? It just makes me so angry. And I have had to start telling myself, whether I believe it or not, that a person wouldn't use it if they didn't need it. I try to give people the benefit of the doubt but I just really don't think that's the case.

Kyle: It's not. I use an accessible stall when I can, because I like them. But I'm entitled to it just like you are, even though I genuinely don't need anything to do with them.

Emily: So I can't really get up your butt about that, but in general...

Kyle: I know, because I'm disabled too. But there's nothing about an accessible bathroom that does me any good. I can use any one of them just as much as anyone else.

Emily: Well unless you start to fall forward and grab onto the bars so you don't fall into the toilet.

Kyle: No, no, no if I fall forward I can just lean against the door, they all open inward.

Emily: All I know is that it's exhausting for me mentally to try to give people the benefit of the doubt all the time.

Kyle: Well, I think that that raises another question, and maybe this is off topic and maybe that's okay. But I don't think...this is a problem that we face in the disability community and I don't doubt that it happens in other social justice, social good intersections as well. Where we tend to uphold the exceptions, because if we think of the exceptions before we're called out on them, because we will be called out on them, that we're somehow more woke or conscious. When in actuality like, there are...like you just did, like you just did! I imagine that you're right in assuming that some guy that doesn't look disabled in accessible stall, isn't disabled. Even though that there are plenty of invisible disabilities that would make him allowed to use that stall. I don't think that consciously considering every exception to every rule that you believe or that I believe, or that anyone believes makes you more aware inherently. I don't. In fact, I think to your point, it adds to exhaustion, and what it ends up doing is making you forget about yourself. I don't know.

Emily: I'm constantly trying to...It's not being politically correct, but it's along the same lines where you're constantly trying to check yourself and catch yourself.

Kyle: Yeah no, I'm not saying that, I'm saying that I don't think that's possible to do all the time. It's one thing to consciously be aware of how you present yourself and how you conduct yourself, but it's quite another to manually, well insofar as you can manually think about something...But like, manually consider like every single exception to every single rule, which we do. And it's like how do you even? All it does is it makes you go, "Well what about these people?" until there's no one left.

Emily: Yeah

Kyle: And I think disability is a unique exception because the "What about" can be a completely different disability than some need of access doesn't address. But with something like a bathroom I wouldn't fault you for assuming incorrectly.

Emily: Actually, I'm thinking about it now and maybe a better example would be an elevator. Especially for me in Penn Station. Fighting people in New York City for an elevator is the bane of my existence. Small elevators, you know everyone wants to shove themselves in and people are often very rude and inconsiderate. And so I recognize that elevators are not just for me. If someone has a massive piece of luggage they're not gonna carry it down the stairs. If someone has a baby stroller, they're not gonna carry it down the stairs. But I think what gets to me sometimes is I see someone who, and again this is totally judging a book by its cover, doesn't look like they need the elevator. And so then I go through this mental checklist in my head and I'm like, "Maybe they have a heart condition, maybe they have asthma, maybe they sprained their ankle."

Kyle: Or, maybe they just want to use the elevator. You know? And that's what I'm saying, and I completely agree with you! I completely agree with you! Where it gets me isn't that they use it, although for you I suppose it's different because you need it and I don't. Where it gets me is that

there's a sign that says, "Please let seniors and people with disabilities board first." And they don't! Like, I know you can read. Don't you say, "Oh, well maybe you can't read." Yes they can.

Emily: Well sometimes I feel a little bit guilty because when it is a senior who's in front of me in a line to an elevator and they let em go first. And then I get into the whole thing where I'm like, "No, no you go first!" And they're like, "No, you!" And then by the time you have this whole conversation the door closes and you miss the elevator.

Kyle: And then you're like, angry at them it's like, "No, you go first you were here first Goddammit!" You know?

Emily: Yeah. So, (*chuckles*) ...But I actually had an experience earlier this week while I was in DC that has literally never happened to me before. I got into the elevator to go up to the street from a the Metro stop, and a woman ran into the elevator, and she looked right at me and she said, "I have no reason to be using this elevator, I just want to use it and you're giving me an excuse to do so." And so in the interest of not getting into an argument with someone on an elevator for a dumb comment, I was just like "Oh yeah, you can keep me company!" But in my head I'm like, "So, how am I your excuse? Like how are you using a stranger in a wheelchair to justify your complete and utter laziness right now?"

Kyle: Because without people like you, there'd be no reason to have them. That's why.

Emily: Elevators did not come into existence for people in wheelchairs!

Kyle: I know that, but that's probably her dumbass thought! I don't know, it's stupid.

Emily: You know what, and then she said...And you know how far it takes to get up on a Metro elevator, they are so far underground you could be on there for half your life.

Kyle: You got a while.

Emily: And then she said something to me because we were exchanging pleasantries, about how she had just given a walking tour of DC to a group of fifth and sixth graders. And so then I'm thinking to myself, "Well, she's an older lady, she gave a walking tour all day, if you don't want to take the stairs that makes sense, fine, whatever." But it was just the fact that she A) Felt the need to justify it after making a dumb comment, and B) Felt the need to justify it at all.

Kyle: Yeah. If she just kept it to herself and started with the walking tour I'm sure she would've been a pleasant elevator guest.

Emily: How about if you just say nothing? I literally never look at people and go, "You don't need that elevator!"

Kyle: No. Well, people in DC talk to people in elevators, it's the weirdest thing.

Emily: Yeah, and that's fine with me, I'm perfectly fine exchanging pleasantries in an elevator, wherever really. And you know I think *maybe* once or twice in my life I have straight up told people to get off the elevator and go take the stairs because I really needed it, and didn't look like anything was "wrong with them." But usually...No, 99% of the time I am very aware that I am not the only human being that wants to use the elevator, and who needs to use the elevator. So, I've come to accept it but it doesn't make it any less frustrating to me while I'm sitting here trying to justify the other person's reasoning for taking precious space in the elevator.

Kyle: Yeah but at the same time you're not considering them...Well, I mean you are, but you're mental faculties that are taking up, "Well it could be this, and this, and this..." It leaves out the much more simpler explanation..

Emily: The much more simpler?

Kyle: Yes, the much more simpler. That actually, that construction, totally off topic...works in languages like German. That's a totally like, okay thing to say. But...you're leaving out the much more simple explanation which is, traditional American selfishness which is, "Hey, I don't wanna take the stairs! Here are not the stairs! I don't have to walk. Walking sucks!" And it does..."And I could just not walk, and I could still get there. I could just press a button, it's amazing and I'll be down without any physical exertion whatsoever!"

Emily: Yeah, and again...it all points back to the fact that, on the one hand I'm judging everyone who doesn't look like they have a disability, and assuming that they don't have a disability. And how much that has to do with how we've been socialized to think about disability. And how much of that is justified.

Kyle: I think most of it is.

Emily: Most of it is what? Which one?

Kyle: I think that most of it is justified. I think your judgement of people, more often than you might think, I think you check yourself too much in that regard. For every hundred people that get on the elevator that don't look disabled, like two actually are and need it. I really do. I don't think that that number is far off. I really think that most people who use the elevator just wanna be lazy. I'd love to be proven wrong, but I don't think I am. However, I also agree with the other thing you said, that you're judging these people and how much of that is being that you equate disability to being in a wheelchair? How much do you equate disability to being in a wheelchair *because* you're in a wheelchair? Questions like these have real answers. But I think it's important to think about that when people discuss things like access needs or the fabled concept of universal design, or, you know accessibility in general. When you're saying "Make something accessible" what you're saying is, "Wide door, ramp with some odd specific degree

incline so that you don't go backwards." That's all well and good. But when I say it, I don't mean that at all, you know? And it's like, you can't convey those two things in one symbol and yet, if both of our access needs are met, they would look completely different, but they would be marked with the little wheelchair stick guy.

Emily: The same symbol, yeah.

Kyle: And that's okay. Like I keep saying, I can't stress that enough. I don't know what I would replace it with. So what it is now is fine. So, you know...

Emily: As fine as it's gonna be, basically,

Kyle: No, I really believe that. I don't, because I also, I also believe, and this might make me a little bit of a hypocrite, is that your access needs as someone in a wheelchair? They don't trump mine, but they do I think most of the time, I don't think it's unsafe to assume that they require more effort on the part of whatever you're making accessible. You know, it's a lot easier I guess to maybe install a banister on your staircase than it is to get rid of the staircase and put in a ramp or an elevator for example. So I don't think that when it comes to accommodations, that it's the most unreasonable thing to assume that accessibility does mean access..

Emily: To assume that accessibility does mean access?

Kyle: For wheelchair users thank you

(Emily laughs)

Kyle: I'm slipping today

Emily: I don't mean to be all correct

Kyle: No, no, no, please

Emily: I just wanna make sure because it's a really complicated topic

Kyle: No, you can always correct me, I welcome it. You know, when we do it to each other it's like, "You know, c'mon"

Emily: I only stop you when you're "mansplaining"

Kyle: What's that?

(Emily laughs)

Kyle: I mean, I know what it is, but if I tell you what it is then...

Emily: Then you'll be mansplaining, mansplaining?

Kyle: Uh...I can't say yes because then that too would be...

Emily: This is a trap!

Kyle: This is a paradox!

Emily: I'm completely kidding

Kyle: I know, I know.

Emily: You're actually making interesting points that are making me consider if the notion that wheelchair is the only disability and disability = wheelchair, has anything to do with the fact that our access barriers are also the most visible.

Kyle: I think that it does. I think that, you say it's a social thing and I agree that that's true to a point but I really do think that physical access needs play a part as well.

Emily: Because you can clearly see, stairs. And granted, so here's where I'm struggling with this thought a little bit. A lot of people don't process stairs when they walk up and down them, and so I've had some instances where

Kyle: Wait a minute

Emily: ...No I'm being serious, I'm completely serious.

Kyle: Ok keep going, because I have a thing to say about that

Emily: So they will actually have to stop and think about if I say, "Oh is your house wheelchair accessible?" I've had friends who've had to stop and think about how many stairs are leading up to their house. Or if I say, "Is that restaurant accessible?" People will have to stop and think if there were stairs leading up to the restaurant. So I find that if accessibility is not in your mentality all the time, then you're not gonna realize it. I have friends who I'm close with, who spend a lot of time with me, where those access barriers have become just as visible... in direct proportion to my wheelchair sort of becoming a less visible thing? The access barriers become more visible if that makes sense? So they're more likely to be looking out for where there are a couple of stairs so that I can't get into it, so they don't invite me to that place.

Kyle: I...I mean, you know I'm biased because I avoid stairs whenever I can too. So I'm very aware of stairs. But do you think that's because they don't subconsciously process stairs as you

said? I'm not arguing, I genuinely don't know. Or could you say that it's because they've never had to think about access needs period...Because they don't? That happens to you and me occasionally, I'm very oriented to access needs as much as I think anyone is in your life, and I occasionally have to think about things because I don't...need them. It's not because I don't see the stairs, it's not because I don't acknowledge them, it's not because I don't know they're there. It's more just because what I'm doing when I think about it is wondering whether or not a barrier makes it more difficult, or completely inaccessible. So like, a little bump? I know you can hop over, for example. But a big bump, I know you can't. So like, okay where's that, you know?

Emily: So maybe I need to be a little more specific. So think about it this way, I'm asking someone if a place is accessible and their like, "Oh yeah, it's just a five or six inch little bump up!" And I'm like, "Five or six inches is not a little bump."

Kyle: Yeah that's a...Okay, okay I see what you're saying. But they don't know that. But then they do I guess if they spend more time with you.

Emily: But it's not that I have the expectation that they need to know that

Kyle: No, of course not!

Emily: It's just more that I find myself having to point out access barriers unless it's like, "There's a giant staircase! Oh, she can't get up that giant staircase." But I do think still, even so that our access barriers are the most visible

Kyle: I agree

Emily: Even when they're still invisible, they're the most visible if that makes sense..even though it's a bit contradictory.

Kyle: Well your access needs aren't visible. The actual needs that you need aren't visible, really. So you know I sorta get it. But there...you know, now that you said that I'm thinking about times when...For example, like in the city if the curb cut is not even a half inch, like 1/8th of an inch off the ground, nine times out of ten, totally fine. But the other time, is when there's a teensy little break in the concrete. And that tiny little break that I can't even see would make somebody in a manual wheelchair tip over their front wheels and fall out of it. 100% of the time

Emily: Oh yeah

Kyle: I...I can't know that. But, even having seen that happen many times, that's something that I don't even know how to be conscious of, because such a thing, no matter how hard I try doesn't affect my life. And It's not that I don't care it's something that I can't remember as easy as, "Oh, this is clearly too large for Emily's chair to hop over, or under."

Emily: It's so interesting how something that you would think would be as simple as a symbol is something that arguably is not symbolic at all, and more to the point is not even close to encompassing what it's trying to convey.

Kyle: Is it though? Because, it's not the International Symbol of Disability. We did that. It's the International Symbol of Access. So maybe it is. I don't know, I don't know. It's weird, you're right.

Emily: Well, to be fair we kind of impose all of our symbolism or concept surrounding disability onto other countries, or we try to.

Kyle: So...but I don't understand, what do you mean?

Emily: Oh I'm just saying that even though it's technically not universal, it's universal.

Kyle: No, it's international. It is technically universal, there's a whole like...

Emily: But you were just saying...wait. I was responding to what you were just saying.

Kyle: No, what I was saying was, we're the people, not America...We, disabled people. We're equating the symbol to disability. People do that.

Emily: Oh gotchu. Gotchu. Gotchu.

Kyle: And that's a problem. But you said that the symbol might not accurately depict what it's supposed to, but I don't know if that's true, because it's supposed to be the International Symbol of Access. Not disability! People do that. And that's the original, that was our topic, but in terms of it denoting access, you can make the case either way. Because on the one hand there's more than just wheelchair access to places but on the other, like we were saying this whole time that wheelchairs are one of the things that require the most modification to anything. So maybe it's doing it's job perfectly and using wheelchair as a shorthand for general accessibility. And the reason that it fails is because there is not a true, universal design that is all encompassing, and that's not the fault of the symbol. You see how deep this goes guys? It's crazy! It's nuts.

Emily: Ooh, we are getting down the rabbit hole!

Kyle: Am I making sense though?

Emily: You're making sense, yeah.

Kyle: It's hard.

Emily: It's ridiculous because the whole thing you think, "Aw it's just a symbol." No, no. There are so many implications and things to consider.

Kyle: Yeah, but even if you're one of those people who take it on face like you know, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar." You know if you're one of those people it's like, "Okay, so it's a wheelchair." Then, what about everyone else? And it's like, okay. It's so weird!

Emily: I think this is gonna be one of those conversations where even in giving our final takeaways, it's not like we can come to any sort of thorough conclusion.

Kyle: I don't know, you know? I would say spell it, but like not everyone speaks English. Not even here. Like it's a bad idea, you can't spell the word "disability." I don't expect "disability" to be a word that children understand, like it's gotta be something you can depict in an image.

Emily: But that goes back to what I said before about how not everybody uses a specific word to identify.

Kyle: Oh yeah, that too!

Emily: So then granted, not everybody uses a specific symbol to identify either, but if you start adding a word rather than a symbol I mean forget it. The world's gonna implode on itself.

Kyle: Yeah, so I genuinely don't have an idea. I will say though, I do like New York's usage of the updated International Symbol of Access. Which was rejected by the ISO standard.

Emily: I like it too. I know a lot people have mixed feelings about it, but I think it's better than nothing. And it's also making me think since we don't have any perfect solution or answer to this topic, I would be really interested to turn it around on the people who have stuck with us this far into the episode and ask if you can somehow tell us on social media or whatever what you think the Accessibility Icon should look like to be more encompassing. Maybe somebody has a great idea that we don't know about.

Kyle: Or even if you think that it should be. I mean, we do but you might not. Like, c'mon make your case. Like, Comment and Subscribe! Or whatever it is you do.

Emily: Oh boy...we just went full Youtube!

Kyle: Ah, whatever. (*unintelligible*)

Emily: But on that note, I think we should give some kind of final takeaways, as is tradition.

Kyle: I think it's a much more complicated issue than can be summed up in one or two sentences. But my final takeaway is, my problem isn't with the symbol, it's more just...my

overarching issue is I think that we as people with disabilities, and I'm speaking for all of us, not just Emily and myself. We're the ones that need more than most people I think to understand that disability doesn't always equal wheelchair, and vice versa. I understand why people who aren't disabled do it. But I truly don't understand why we do it. We don't have an excuse. So, be a little bit more conscious if you can help it. And if you can't, I won't blame ya!

Emily: So, my final takeaway is something I honestly didn't talk about too much throughout the episode, but it's more something that would like to leave people with. The importance of diversifying your representation of people with disabilities. In order to help move away from the notion that wheelchair is synonymous to disability. The only way I think we're gonna start accomplishing it is if we start reflecting it and seeing it reflected back on us. So, in the media, not everyone with a disability needs to be in a hospital style wheelchair...that ubiquitous hospital style wheelchair. It's time that we start making disability that we see look more like the disability that actually exists.

Kyle: How do you convey an invisible disability...

Emily: Right, right, right! So that's where things get sticky, but I think that we still need to see people who have invisible disabilities.

Kyle: Baby steps.

Emily: You can still see that person. You might not see the disability, we should still be seeing those people though. Whether they disclose or not, I really think we need to start getting to a point where it's enough in our consciousness that we're aware that anyone could have a disability and you just don't see it.

Kyle: Yeah, but how do you start that fire, you know? That's a weird one when it comes to disability, invisibly in the media. I agree with you, I'm not...Anyway, that's for another episode!

Emily: Yeah I think I definitely got a little bit into something that is worth talking about on another episode. But on the whole what I was trying to say is, diversify your representation and stop making it all about wheelchairs. Despite the fact that I use a wheelchair, it doesn't mean that it is the only disability. And wheelchairs aren't disabilities either, while we're at it! I don't know why it took me this long to say it, but like..

Kyle: Emily

Emily: What

Kyle: There's only one disability in life...it's a bad attitude.

Emily: Oh, why did you...why?

Kyle: You set me up for it!

Emily: You're so...I just...

Kyle: Anyway!

Emily: I just wanna reach through my computer and...

Kyle: Here, I'll punch myself in the face for you.

Emily: ...Whack you with an ice skate that I took off of Scott Hamilton

Kyle: Right. Goodnight everybody! Thanks for listening.

Emily: Bye, thanks for listening!