

**File Name: TAS-025-Accessibility.Vs.InclusionPROPER.mp3**

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**[START OF TRANSCRIPT]**

**Emily:** Okay. It's real talk time. After Kyle and I finished recording the entire episode that you're about to listen to, we realized that podcasts in and of themselves are not an accessible medium. Hey. I'm Emily Ladau.

**Kyle:** I'm Kyle Khachadurian.

**Emily:** You're listening to another episode of The Accessible Stall.

**Kyle:** What's so funny Emily?

**Emily:** We've tried to record this like 20 times.

**Kyle:** What are we going to talk about today Emily?

**Emily:** I don't even remember. I don't even know.

**Kyle:** I do.

**Emily:** You tell me Kyle.

**Kyle:** We're going to talk about access and we talked about it before but this time we're going to talk about what happens when an already existing thing that's inaccessible tries to make it accessible. Is it a good thing? Is it a bandage? Is it a bad thing? We're here to talk about it. Gosh dang it. Emily, why don't you tell these lovely people what prompted this discussion?

**Emily:** There was an article published in the Washington Post and it's about an exhibit called Infinity Mirrors at the Hirshhorn, what is it... Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, apparently the exhibit is totally inaccessible and mind you I'm talking specifically from what I know in the article. Kyle and I have not experienced the exhibit although we would like to and probably will try to do so at some time but the reality is that I actually can't experience the exhibit because it's not wheelchair accessible. The team at this museum decided that the best way to recreate the experience would be using a virtual reality headset. Basically someone who cannot navigate through the actual installation itself can basically hang out somewhere else with a headset on and experience the exhibit that way.

**Kyle:** Yes, and that creates the conundrum because that's not real accessibility on one hand but on the other it's really cool and according to this article tons of effort went into this. This took like four months to

develop and clearly it had good intentions. Now, like Emily said we haven't been there but my God, we want to go and see this but--

**Emily:** I have mixed feelings.

**Kyle:** Well yeah. Go on.

**Emily:** On the one hand I want to go experience it and I think it's pretty cool that something like virtual reality exists in order to give someone an experience that they might not otherwise have but it's not an inclusive experience and it doesn't really feel like a real solution. It kind of feels to me like the world's most expensive and technological afterthought, it's a pretty cool after thought but it's still an afterthought.

**Kyle:** Does accessibility necessarily have to be inclusive?

**Emily:** Yes.

**Kyle:** Why?

**Emily:** Why not?

**Kyle:** I'm not saying it should or shouldn't but you're saying it should, so why does it have to necessitate inclusion? Why can't something... I'm not saying it should be separate but equal. Separate but equal is not equal but in a situation that doesn't have an existing accessible solution.

**Emily:** This is one of those things where I understand that museum exhibits are not accessible to everyone. If you're blind, virtual reality is certainly not going to make this more accessible to you. You can walk through but you can't experience what the exhibit has to offer but for something like wheelchair access in which making it inaccessible to wheelchair users could somehow be avoided with a little bit of thinking about it especially because that's what the law requires in a public entity, I think there needs to be better forethought and planning-

**Kyle:** Of course there should but... yeah. Okay. You're right but they didn't, so now what? Of course, you're absolutely right. Everything should be accessible starting from 1990 on but they're not. I think that doing this, it's not a solution. You're right but it's more than lots of places do.

**Emily:** Actually you asked me before if accessibility should be inclusive and it occurs to me--

**Kyle:** No, no, no. I asked you if it shouldn't necessitate inclusion. Of course it should be inclusive but I'm saying I don't really know. We always assume that it should be, it something that doesn't really come up.

**Emily:** That's actually an important point. A lot of people think that accessibility is pretty much it and that accessibility is inclusion but I

would argue that accessibility is often not inclusion because it has to be an add-on. In this case it's access but it's not inclusion. There are two different things. If we're celebrating trying to create a form of access, it's cool. It's really cool. I think it's great that they put so much effort into finding this kind of a solution but is it a solution? I mean, is there a solution? Do we deconstruct this kind of art to make it accessible to wheelchair users? It's a really tough question.

**Kyle:** I don't know. How old is this exhibit? Is it ADA? Probably not-

**Emily:** No. It's brand new.

**Kyle:** Okay. Does the ADA to your knowledge, I'll look this up because I don't really know but does it have exemptions for things that are art? You know what I mean? You can force somebody to make art accessible or maybe you can.

**Emily:** I honestly don't know so I think that's interesting to talk about.

**Kyle:** We'll look it up in the show notes but actually before we know, I want to have this discussion. Well tangential but it's a good to have. Should art be forced to be accessible? I don't think so.

**Emily:** I just think that art by its very nature is going to be inaccessible to someone.

**Kyle:** Exactly. That's why I don't think so. You should make an effort, don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm saying if it's coming straight from an artist's mind, you should interfere with it as little as possible.

**Emily:** To me I can't decide if this use of virtual reality is akin to something like audio description of an art piece or closed captioning on an art piece or subtitles if it's a visual art piece or a movie or something like that. You can find ways to make art accessible to people who are blind but you can't make them see the art. You can find ways to make art accessible to people who are deaf but you can't make them hear the art. It's this one of those things where you can find ways to make art accessible to people with mobility disability but sometimes you just can't.

**Kyle:** Well, maybe but here's what I don't know and this is sort of why I'm curious to go there myself, is mobility necessary to experience the exhibit because if the answer is no, it doesn't matter whether or not you're looking through virtual reality or you're actually in the room and I don't know the answer. I agree with you that it's not a perfect solution but I'm talking strictly about this one specific thing and I don't know. If it isn't then suddenly while it's still not the best solution, it's a better one.

**Emily:** Another thing that's just occurring to me is art is important but it's not something I really need to get along in my life and so if I can't access this one particular exhibit, then I think I'm going to survive another day.

**Kyle:** That's a very good point.

**Emily:** But I get frustrated because the same logic sometimes seem to apply to things that are more necessary in life. Although now that I'm thinking about it, you know those like robot things with the video camera attached to it so that you can attend an event virtually and operate the robot virtually?

**Kyle:** Yes.

**Emily:** Like really cool people like Alice Wang and Dominic Evans have used it for the White House? We should definitely link to that in the show notes. Is that kind of not similar?

**Kyle:** I would say it is.

**Emily:** It's not similar in that you're technically still being included because you don't have to sit alone while everyone else experiences something because you're technically there with them virtually but you are sort of also alone and experiencing it in a virtual reality sort of way but in that case it's giving people access to something that you would not otherwise have access to that's necessary like an event or education you need it for school.

**Kyle:** I don't think that something being necessary should determine whether or not something should be accessible or even how it should be accessible. I think things that are necessary should be more accessible than not because they're necessary but blind people see movies, they do. They don't see them but they attend and they have their ways of experiencing them and because it's a visual medium even though it's inclusive, it's not accessible. It's sort of the opposite problem but no one seems to care. Blind people still love going to the movies and it's fine.

**Emily:** Do we know this or we just saying this like it's a blanket statement? I would assume--

**Kyle:** The blind people I know don't care and Tommy Edison on YouTube he's like an authority because he's got like a quarter of a million subscribers and he doesn't care. He loves movies. I understand it's not every anything does anything. Do we have to say that at this point?

**Emily:** No, absolutely. It's one of those things that I don't think have an answer but it sort of frustrating and also a reality.

**Kyle:** The only point I was trying to make though was that that's an example of something that's inclusive but not accessible. I agree that those two things should coexist, I just don't know if they have to and I don't know if and when there's a time to exclude one. I think that that's really the mean potato of this more than what's a bandage to accessibility is, does accessibility and inclusion have to exist together? I don't know. We just named examples where they don't and some are okay and some aren't.

**Emily:** Yeah. It's also super situation dependent because when it comes to education or people who use those virtual reality robots to go to a classroom because they're unable to attend school due to their disability or someone who's unable to attend an event due to their disability, that's not exclusion but it's also--

**Kyle:** It's not inclusion?

**Emily:** Yeah but to be fair a lot of people attend things online so you can take a class online whether you have a disability or not, you can attend an event virtually because a lot of events are offered via live stream or webinar now whether you have a disability or not. I would say the VR is sort of the same because it's offering you the experience but the problem is that something like art tends to be something that you take in with people. You go to a museum with people.

**Kyle:** I don't.

**Emily:** Okay. I go to a museum with people.

**Kyle:** I understand that other people are there but now the question at least for me becomes if you get the experience one way or another, does it matter that something isn't accessible. I don't know. I really don't. Truly I'm not being funny.

**Emily:** I think it matters if it's the full experience in a legitimate way. If you go to a movie and the movie and the audio described, and you can hear the dialogue and the sound effects and things like that, then I would say that you're getting the experience to the fullest extent that your ability allows you to but--

**Kyle:** You wouldn't say the same about the VR though because I would? That's exactly what I would say.

**Emily:** I would but something about it feels different to me because that ... If you're blind, you have no control over whether or not you can see a movie and no creator of a movie is going to have control over whether or not a blind person can see a movie, whereas someone creating art that's a conscious choice you can make to make your art exhibit accessible to people who use mobility devices.

**Kyle:** Movies are art first of all but that's just me being petty. Secondly, --

**Emily:** I'm talking about like--

**Kyle:** I know what you're talking about but then the question becomes do you force the artist to modify their work? I don't know. I really don't and this isn't me hating on disable people. I don't know to what extent do you force an artist to change their vision on the basis of your needs. I don't know if there's a good answer to that.

**Emily:** No. I don't think there is because on the one end I don't think I would want somebody interfering with my artistic vision, not that I'm the artist type.

**Kyle:** Yeah, we're not artists so we don't know really. We have really no idea what we're talking about right now but it's brain food and it's just so weird. I hear you. Believe me I understand you when say something about a VR helmet doesn't feel right. I don't know about you but to me it feels lazy but then you read and you see they clearly put some effort into this and then it's like, "Okay but it can't be that lazy if they went through all that trouble." But then it's like, "Well if they're not being so lazy, why couldn't you make the thing accessible in the first place?"

**Emily:** You know what? I'm putting my finger on it just now. Someone with a disability going to see a movie, they have a choice whether or not they go see that movie but it's like I don't have a choice as to whether or not I can navigate this particular exhibit. The choice was made for me. It was VR or nothing, that the choice is not there for me.

**Kyle:** No but the movie is a movie or nothing.

**Emily:** Right but the space is not physically closed off.

**Kyle:** But it doesn't matter if the space is physically closed off when they're giving you an alternative that apparently allows you to have the experience fully realized without need to be in the space and that's the clocks be issue. I don't know.

**Emily:** Yeah. It's so hard. The other thing too is I know that we're talking about it without having done it and I really would like to experience what the VR has to offer but the few times that I've tried VR, it's immersive but it's really isolating. That goes for anyone.

**Kyle:** Yeah. You're saying that if you were to go into the exhibit itself, you'd have other people around you--

**Emily:** Yeah. There's something to be said about being around other people while you experience something.

**Kyle:** All right, that I'll give you. That's true.

**Emily:** I tried a VR headset, I admit I don't know too much because I've only tried it once or twice but I was playing a game on it so I'm kind of shooting game where you had to shoot bottles at a carnival. It was a silly little here's how virtual reality works and it was really cool but it was also very strange because it immerses you in a world where like other people don't exist.

**Kyle:** Yes. I find that fascinating about it myself.

**Emily:** It's super interesting but that's as far as it goes for me. It's interesting and then it becomes like, "Oh wait but I'm alone."

**Kyle:** I don't know but maybe the idea is that the immersion will overtake the feeling of inevitable loneliness but then again does it? I don't know.

**Emily:** This is not something limited to virtual reality. This is how I feel every time some alternative solution is proposed to me. You can go to this event but you have to sit somewhere separate or you can go to this location but you need to take a separate entrance. It's always that reminder that, I hate to say separate but equal but then it really is what it is. And sometimes it's no fault of anyone, it's just the way that a structure that you know, in order to provide access they had to add it where they could. And sometimes that means you can't just slap a ramp on top of steps and call it a day. You have to find an actual spot for it. That's just in a really simplistic example but I constantly I'm made to feel like I can do something but just not quite all the way or exactly the same.

**Kyle:** For you the ends do not justify the means?

**Emily:** What do you mean?

**Kyle:** Like the ability to do something doesn't overwrite the struggle it took to get to that point for you? I'm asking, I have no idea-

**Emily:** No because on the whole I would rather be able to do it than not do it so I suppose that actually contradicts my initial mindset that I kind of was saying about all or nothing.

**Kyle:** How often do we contradict ourselves, all the time?

**Emily:** All the time so yeah it's great that I can do something. Like that's awesome but sometimes I just wish I could do it like everyone else; go in the same door, sit in the same area, have the same opportunities.

**Kyle:** But accessibility is giving you the same opportunities, maybe not in the same way. I don't know, I mean, it's tough.

**Emily:** Well, in the case of the virtual reality thing, it's not giving me the same opportunity.

**Kyle:** No you're right.

**Emily:** It's giving me a different version to experience something so that I feel somewhat like I'm having the same opportunity.

**Kyle:** But, if the experiences are identical but for the people, I mean we don't know maybe they put like other people in the fake room with you.

**Emily:** My goodness.

**Kyle:** They might, I don't know.

**Emily:** I mean the only thing I can think of, and again this would be helpful for us to go the exhibit-

**Kyle:** We should really go there.

**Emily:** Yeah. Like accessible stroll will take a field trip but maybe it's virtual reality in the sense of happening at the same time as other people are in the exhibit so you can see them.

**Kyle:** In the article, it did specify that there were six of them. So what if on the off tents two or more people were using the helmets at the same time would they show up in the room? These are questions that we needed to have answered in order to-

**Emily:** Yeah and we definitely need to experience it in real life. So this is obviously a little bit hypothetical in terms of that we haven't experienced this particular event but-

**Kyle:** No but this happens all the time. I mean where does accessibility start and inclusion end?

**Emily:** Yeah. This particular museum exhibit that was featured in Washington Post was just the impetus for us to think about a larger question.

**Kyle:** It's one that I've quite frankly never thought of. Have you? Have you ever tried to separate the two?

**Emily:** Yes but only because I'm faced with that constantly.

**Kyle:** But explicitly though have you?

**Emily:** Yeah.

**Kyle:** Really? Okay.

**Emily:** Perfect example being the women's march where some of the organizers-

**Kyle:** Right, you did such good work. I will never not ... I'm sorry to interrupt you every time you bring up the women's march but I must. It's in my blood to commend you for your efforts.

**Emily:** Kyle, sharks. When the organizers were confronted about accessibility and inclusion and not having an exclusionary platform, literally the response that was sent from one of the organizers Linda Sarsaw, I feel very strongly they need to call her out on this and could even put a screen shot of the text to prove it. She sent an email saying that, "Oh we value our disabled brothers and sisters very much because we have accessible toilets and we've paid a lot of attention to accessibility and we're very proud of the work that the disability caucus is doing." And I was like, yeah, me too. The disability caucus is doing cool things and accessibility is great. But just because something is accessible doesn't mean that it's inclusive. This is a message that I don't think that all the women's march organizers got but some of them certainly did hence why the changes were made. But yeah the reality is that people seem to think that accessible bathrooms suddenly means you're inclusive.

**Kyle:** I mean I have my feelings on her as well so I'm not going to really say that.

**Emily:** Yeah that's a topic for off the podcast.

**Kyle:** Yeah you're right and to the point too, there's plenty of things that are supposed to be inclusive that just play aren't accessible like most buildings.

**Emily:** Yeah like the experience of accessing a public building should be inclusive by it's very nature.

**Kyle:** No but it is, it's just that you can't get int. But if you did, you'd be included. Like that's the thing. That's the opposite, if you could get in, you would be included like everyone else but you can't. So, and it's funny because now that I'm thinking about it, that's what we usually fight for. When you think about accessibility, you're almost always fighting for an in rather than not only do I want to get in, I want to experience this exactly the same. And there's nothing wrong with that. Obviously like the first step in getting things done is getting into a place.

But now that I'm thinking about it, yeah, like physical barriers need to be broken down first and that sounds obvious but it's never really, a little light bulb turned on just now.

**Emily:** It's always only the first step.

**Kyle:** Absolutely.

**Emily:** Because inclusion is not just a ramp over a stair. It's an attitude, a mindset and a willingness to immerse people in the same experience that everyone else is having to the absolute best of your ability. That's what I see lacking so much. You know, I'm willing to not whine and complain about certain things being inaccessible. Like am I going to get mad that I can't tour some historical sites? Is it frustrating? Yes but I'm not going to say no please mess with these historical ruins and make them 100% accessible to me so that I can experience them like anything else. In fact, I would argue that I would rather someone give me a virtual tour of you know, ancient historical sites that I can't access. Like give me a VR headset and let me go through a tour of historical sites in Europe and take all that in or climb to the top of Mount Everest through a virtual reality headset because I'm aware that some things are just physically not possible for me. But when you're creating something now and not thousands and thousands and thousands of years ago, I just don't think there's an excuse anymore.

**Kyle:** Fair enough. Yeah I agree that's exactly how I feel about all of that.

**Emily:** For that matter, I would really love someone to hook me up with a virtual reality tour of a bunch of ancient ruins that I can't navigate. I mean really.

**Kyle:** I have one, I have one we can do that. I can bring it to you. Yeah.

**Emily:** See, that's cool and that I would consider accessibility.

**Kyle:** It's funny you brought up historical sites because I suppose there are arguments to be made to accessibilize them although I'm with you in that, but there are some there like able bodied people just can't do either because it's too old or too steep or too anything, too broken. And there are also some that like, you know like a dare devil might do. Like, oh here's the steepest mountain ever, here climb to your death and the only safety is a rope ladder or a rope fence or something. It's like, okay, that's not accessible to every able bodied person either. But the only point I'm trying to make is that like, accessibility it's not all black and

white you know. Nothing is in our world but you know, we like to pretend it is and when we're faced with situations like these, it just sort of proves that it's not.

**Emily:** Yeah it's really situation dependent and that seems to be the moral that I get every time I read about something being inaccessible or about something being made inaccessible and then having accessibility added on.

**Kyle:** Yeah but, I remember you and I don't use a wheelchair so, you know, it might be different but while I would love it if accessibility was at the forefront of every new project, I know it's not and I would rather see some form of accessibility implemented somewhere more than I'd like to see nothing implemented anywhere. I mean, that's just-

**Emily:** Yeah.

**Kyle:** I understand it's not ideal but also you know, if we're going on things that are already not accessible, I feel like some effort is almost always better than no effort. In fact in order for effort to be worse than no effort, I feel like you really have to try hard to achieve that.

**Emily:** Yeah.

**Kyle:** You know like if your idea of accessibility was like oh I don't know to metal rails that fit the width of your wheelchair while you drive up a small step or two because that's happened, we've done that, that's insulting. That's an inaccessible place trying so little it would ... again, I don't know about you but if I were you, I would legitimately like, I would rather them tell me that I wasn't welcome.

**Emily:** Yeah, I get so frustrated.

**Kyle:** Like if that was just such-

**Emily:** It's honestly the same way that I feel about places with one step up.

**Kyle:** Yeah, it's like oh, you almost had it.

**Emily:** Really that's an easy fix. Don't you dare tell me you can't fix that with a tiny little metal plate over it.

**Kyle:** Or even a piece of plywood. I mean really like that's no effort.

**Emily:** Yeah come on now. I mean, one time I went to a drag restaurant in Greenwich Village in New York City and I was told when I called that

they were wheelchair accessible and when I got there, they were absolutely so confounded by my power chair and by my general existence. They went and got a cabinet door and put it over some steps. At that point I was like, I appreciate the effort and telling the story about drag queens pushing you up a cabinet door in the middle of Greenwich Village late at night is a funny story, but also at that point, why did you tell me you were accessible?

**Kyle:** Were they accessible if you had a manual chair? I mean power-

**Emily:** Yeah if you picked me up and carried me.

**Kyle:** You know what, it's a lie. I hear you but I mean that's, that might be exactly what they thought.

**Emily:** That's one of those things where I wish it was all or nothing. Like if you're really not accessible and it's going to be that much of an effort and possibly a danger to my wellbeing because you have a bunch of people in high heels pushing me up a steep wooden cabinet door that heaven only knows how old it is and probably could break under the weight of my wheelchair for all I know, I mean, at that point I'd rather you just say, "Sorry we're inaccessible." I really would. So and you were saying something before about it being kind of like an insult when they barely even try. And for some reason, when I'm thinking about this virtual reality thing, I still feel insulted. I know how hard they tried, I do, I know but it still feels like an insult to me.

**Kyle:** I mean I can go into the exhibit so I really can't speak to your feelings but yeah I mean sure, you're entitled to that I suppose. Although if I may back up just a little bit, even though I did say that such little effort is insulting and even though you agreed, I feel like the example you gave could have been better because breaking or using a cabinet door to push you up a set of steps like, I mean there's effort and then effort. But that kind of effort is oh my god we totally screwed up what do we do. And I, that's like a lot of effort. I'm not saying it was still a terrible thing, of course it was but I mean how many places would go that far?

**Emily:** I don't know. It's effort in this sort of weirdly dehumanizing way. I can't quite explain it, like you suddenly become an object that has to be dealt with.

**Kyle:** Yeah okay I was just curious because I would rather, I mean, I would be embarrassed but I feel like at the end of the day, I'd appreciate it in some way.

**Emily:** Well that's the other thing. It's super embarrassing right? So you know, okay I'm going to bring up a date again. I'm just dating in general, I'm going to bring it up because I can't help myself, stop making a face at me.

**Kyle:** No.

**Emily:** What if I was going on a date to this museum with somebody and we're having this perfectly nice romantic time and then all of a sudden we have to part ways so that he can, assuming he is able bodied, go walk through the exhibit while I'm sitting there by myself. I mean, have you ever heard of such a buzz kill in your life?

**Kyle:** No but in that situation I wouldn't go there.

**Emily:** What if I had no idea? What if I never thought of the Washington Post article?

**Kyle:** No, I understand. Well, to be fair if you've never seen it, I don't about you but if you've never seen it, I feel like if you were faced with a situation and they were like, "Oh, you can't go in but we have virtual reality experience," you'd be like, "Holy shit really, that's pretty neat." I think that's how you would-

**Emily:** I suppose you're not wrong.

**Kyle:** It's in the moment but I feel like because you know that it's not ideal, that's why it's upsetting more than the fact that-

**Emily:** But I'm also the type of person who tries to plan things in advance and I come up against inaccessibility so often that that tends to be the quickest buzz kill. I've had it be a buzz kill.

**Kyle:** Oh yeah I'm not disputing your experience, I'm just saying like, if you didn't know and you spontaneously went to this thing, I feel like both of you would be pretty excited. Like I feel like you're able bodied date would want to try that too instead of go in.

**Emily:** I mean yeah. So that would be actually the ultimate test for me s will he ditch me and go in or will he say, "It's an art exhibit. It's fine if I don't actually go in; I'm going to do the virtual reality thing with you."

**Kyle:** I agree but I feel like if he were to go in, that would make him a crappy date more than anything else.

**Emily:** That's what I'm saying.

**Kyle:** Yeah anyway, final takeaways maybe?

**Emily:** Yes, final takeaways. So my final take away is I don't necessarily believe that accessibility has to be all or nothing because sometimes it really can't be but when it's possible to make something accessible and you just don't and then you hawk something as a solution but it's exclusionary and not completely a form of accessibility, then I'm going to go ahead and say, try harder.

**Kyle:** Mine is Emily is correct.

**Emily:** Wow that's my favorite take away of all time.

**Kyle:** Accessibility is important inclusion is important both are ideal, both are not always possible and you don't always think about that until you're faced with odd situations like these. And although that's not a true final takeaway, I will just go back to my original, Emily is correct in what she said.

**Emily:** Our ultimate final takeaway while I'm basking in the glow of Kyle saying I'm correct is that we are going to try to get to this exhibit and get back to you.

**Kyle:** Definitely. There's going to be a follow up episode.

**Emily:** Extensible store live from inside a museum.

**Kyle:** **[0:32:32 We'll follow you real quick though].**

**Emily:** Anyway I'm glad we talked about it even though we haven't yet experienced it because it really is something worth thinking about. And if it warranted an article in the Washington Post specifically celebrating what's supposed to be some kind of innovative solution to inaccessibility, then it makes me think that we need to be talking about this in a lot of other areas of life so I think it's a good thing that we're talking.

**Kyle:** Who knows and it might be and that's exactly why we're about to get on a train in about 50 years and go and do this-

**Emily:** We are probably going to like get on a train tomorrow with studio.

**Kyle:** Yes it's **[0:33:14 inaudible]** let's do it, all right, good bye everybody.

**Emily:** Anyway, bye, thanks for listening.

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**

