

The Accessible Stall Podcast

Episode 66: #DoctorsAreDickheads

(Intro music)

E: Hi I'm Emily Ladau

K: And I'm Kyle Khachadurian

E: And you're listening to another episode of *The Accessible Stall*

K: Hey Emily, how about you tell these lovely people how they can help support the show, huh?

E: Pretty simple. All you have to do is visit our Patreon which is: www.patreon.com/theaccessiblestall and you can choose the amount per month that you want to donate. And we will use that money to help transcribe our episodes so that *The Accessible Stall* is da da da daahhhh....

K: More accessible! Isn't she good at that guys! Anyway, what are we gonna talk about today, Emily?

E: So there's been a hashtag trending on Twitter right now, especially Disability Twitter it is #DoctorsAreDickheads. And I have some feelings about it, so I told Kyle about these feelings, and Kyle also has some feelings about it... we're gonna talk about our feelings.

K: That's what we do here.

E: In the Accessible Stall! So here's the thing, the long and short of it is that #NotAllDoctors has been going around apparently and that's an offshoot I'm pretty sure of #NotAllMen which is trying to defend the man-o-sphere to the rest of the world. And so I have a problem with #NotAllMen. I also think #NotAllDoctors is kind of annoying. But then someone decided to point out that yes, all doctors, which then turned into #DoctorsAreDickheads, I don't know how many times I'm gonna have to say 'dickheads' this episode, but it's already getting ridiculous so, apologies. Now #DoctorsAreDickheads is going around talking about all of the trauma and trouble doctors have caused people with disabilities, right? Not an invalid complaint.

K: Seems completely fair.

E: However, the Doctor Community, although I really think it's just Twitter in general is fighting back with #PatientsareDickheads. And now, I think what was supposed to have a useful point has now turned into a playground level argument and I think that a big amount of the reason for that is that 'dickhead,' that's a fighting word as far as I'm concerned! And look, I get it. Doctors

sometimes...In fact, more than sometimes need to be put in their place about how they mistreat and disrespect disabled patients but uh...looks like I'm the odd one out here on this particular hashtag trend because I'm not okay with it! I don't think it's productive at all. I think that the things that are being said are productive but I think they're being drowned out because someone decided that they like alliteration.

K: People stop reading if the first thing that you do is insult them. And valid or not, that's what you're doing with #DoctorsAreDickheads even though some of the various claims under that hashtag are completely, 100% valid.

E: It's really pointing to a larger issue for me which is that all social justice activist communities could benefit from not approaching education and activism in that particular way. And I know that I'm about to be told that I am tone policing and who am I to say this? Whatever. Look, I'm a disabled person who's dealt with doctors so I feel like I get a fair say in this.

K: I don't think you have to defend yourself. I mean actually I do think you do, I don't think you should have to unfortunately, but I agree with you. I think it's really, not to sound cliché but you really do catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar.

E: And the argument to that, because I've already thought of this from pretty much all sides. People try honey and it doesn't work so now it's time to bust out the vinegar.

K: Maybe. And sure, there are certain times where you do bust out the vinegar but this is the first I'm seeing of this hashtag. It's pretty new, and if this hashtag is the culmination of always trying honey and then finally being frustrated enough to try vinegar, that's fine. But the consequence of that is that if you are "Average Joe M.D." scrolling through your Twitter feed being a good doctor, that's gonna leave a bad taste in your mouth. And it's like, it's nobody's fault but like it or not that's gonna make them think twice, and not for the reasons that you think they will, and that's not good.

E: Yeah, that's the thing, I think this is the kind of thing that could have a ripple effect. Maybe not a big one, because I don't know exactly how many doctors are poking around on this particular hashtag, but I think what's really getting to me is that I rely on interactions with doctors to quite literally, save my life. I have relied on them in the past, I know that I will continue to, and that's not the message I would want to give a doctor! I've had some of the most horrible, arrogant, rude, condescending doctors, including one who had a disability actually, who might've been the worst doctor I've ever seen. Um, he had a disability himself. I get it from both sides. I get it on both sides. Doctors can be dickheads but I'm not really sure that this is an effective way to communicate that to them. And if you leave a bad taste in one doctor's mouth, that can ruin someone's interaction.

K: A former employer of mine has been doing this study that involves the way women in particular, but also how individuals with CP are treated at the doctor's office. And one of the

statistics that they found that they love to regurgitate so to speak, is that eighty percent of all new medical professionals have not yet treated a person with a disability by the time they leave med school. And that's a giant problem! I mean, it's a big blindspot! You're gonna interact with more disabled people as a doctor than most people would on their day to day basis by virtue of the fact that we have more medical needs. And that's ridiculous that that's true! But imagine being if you will, a fresh twenty-five year old guy or woman or whatever, and you see the entire Disability Community, or at least the ones that are active on Twitter posting that hashtag and it's like I can honestly imagine that you're not even gonna want, you're not even gonna look forward to having your first disabled patient. Agh God, it's a vicious circle and it worries me because you know, like Emily a doctor saved my life. I don't rely on them anymore but 100% without a doctor I wouldn't be here podcasting right now.

E: Same!

K: Yeah. And I'm not saying that that dissolves every doctor of their condescension, of their abusing their powers as a doctor or taking away a disabled person's bodily autonomy, we touched on that in a previous episode. That doesn't make it okay, but what it does do is it sort of makes you--makes me, check myself before I bad mouth any member of a community that I do in fact, owe my life to in a very literal sense.

E: Yeah, that's the thing. Like there is a power dynamic, there absolutely is. Doctors can be horrible, doctors don't listen, I have doctors who have talked over me, who have ignored what I've said, who haven't taken me seriously, who have talked to other people in the room and not addressed me, I mean, the list goes on. Doctors who have asked you know, straight up invasive questions about my disability that had nothing to do with the treatment. Like, just so y'all know, I really do think doctors can be dickheads. Like I was getting a skin check because I had a melanoma on my body. And so after I had the melanoma taken off, now I have to get skin checks every three months. And I'm sitting there, no clothes on, on a table with my Dermatologist and she goes, "So can you have a baby?"

K: Ha!

E: And I was like, "Are you kidding me? Like this is..."

K: Sorry, I didn't mean to laugh at you I've just never heard this story before.

E: No no. And my mom was in the room and the two of us were just like, "What the hell did you just say to me? Like, I'm in the most awkward, uncomfortable position with you right now checking every inch of my body because I just had *cancer* removed from my body and you're asking me the invasive question of if I can have a baby?? Like, who do you think you are?"

K: And that's why it's important that when doctors leave Med school that they've already interacted with People With Disabilities so that when they finally do come across one in the wild that they're not some sort of alien from outer space that they don't know how to interact with.

E: Yeah. And calling them a 'dickhead?' Not going to accomplish that. Like, that's the thing. The message behind the hashtag? Really important. People are bearing their shows and sharing incredibly painful things. I also have my list of incredibly painful things and I'm sure you do too but the thing is somebody who could literally have power over your life like that? I'd rather educate them! I would, I would rather have a conversation, I'd rather go talk to medical school. I mean, would you go talk to a medical school and start out and be like, "Yo, dickheads what up?" Like, no you wouldn't! I don't know...maybe you would...

K: No no I wouldn't, I wouldn't! I know that you're sort of putting that out there metaphorically to our listeners but I wouldn't! I just wouldn't. I think that that's a great way to leave a sour taste in the mouths of all the doctors that they will generalize to the people with disabilities just as the hashtag generalizes all doctors and of course just like Emily, that's not to say that doctors can't be dickheads because Lord knows they can. But when you come out of the gate with that it's like, what's your end goal? Like what do you want to accomplish?

E: Well I can tell quite clearly the end goal in this case is to get doctors to set aside their egos and listen, but it just doesn't seem to be the way to accomplish it. And that frustrates me because I try so hard on a personal level to be patient with medical professionals in the hopes that I can be the one who can educate them so that other people can have a better experience. And I wish it wasn't like that, I wish that my gynecologist didn't still call me "Wheelchair Bound" every time she saw me. You know I wish that doctors would stop saying "Oh well it's understandable if you weigh a little bit more because like, you're in that wheelchair!" Like, "Oh, oh really? Well thanks for you know, noticing!" I wish doctors would stop making annoying comments, I really do but...

K: I mean... I obviously don't have the same experience as you do because I don't use a wheelchair. I don't know how many times I've said it on this show, but in case anyone didn't know, I do in fact walk around. And I also know that I'm the teachable moment guy. Like I'm much more okay than you are with it on a daily basis because I know you get bombarded with it like twenty times more than I ever do in a day. But I honesty, if there's one kind of population, if there's one kind of person that I really wanna teach it's doctors because that is a symbiotic relationship if that ever was one! I mean really, it's like, we need them and they should stand to learn from us. I just don't think calling them dickheads on Twitter is the way to do it.

E: Yeah and I think that that's not to say that doctors don't need a firm reminder, more than firm. It's like, "No, you're treating me, you're working for me, You listen to me!"

K: Yeah! Absolutely! Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you, I just wanna reiterate your point.

E: Oh no no, I know you agree with me, that's fine.

K: That's just because I don't want what we're saying to get lost on the people who are listening. It's like, the message behind the hashtag is 100% valid, it's just the way that it's presented just rubs me the wrong way.

E: And I think this is really pointing to a larger issue about how, and I touched on this a little bit before, but about how activism communities approach things. I think there's a way to do it. I mean, and look I know I spent so long being angry that this is how it comes out and that we shouldn't be policing people's anger, but I don't think it hurts either to think about the framing of your message. Maybe I'm going to get in trouble for this comparison but one thing that really struck me. So #BlackLivesMatter. I think that there's value in that because it is centering the person, the people who the issue is about, you know? And it's not doing so in a way that's calling anyone any names, it's not doing so in a way that's intending to be alienating, unfortunately too many people misinterpreted it as such. But I just think that Black Lives Matter is an example of a movement that has a phrase that did not start out in an alienating linguistic sense. Am I making any sense right now?

K: Yeah. You're not talking about the expense of someone else, you're talking about yourself in the case of Black Lives Matter or your somebody who believes that black lives matter. Either way, if you're a black person who believes that black lives matter or someone who's not black that believes that black lives matter which frankly we all should in case we have one of those All Lives Matter audience...

E: UGH!

K: Please get it through your head that that's a very different thing. But even as you said, that hashtag is not at the expense of anyone else. And in comparison to this, in strictly words only terms, this one is: Doctors are Dockheads

E: I'm trying to imagine how the Black Lives Matter Movement would have gone if the hashtag was #WhitePeopleAreDickheads. Which like, we are.

K: Not well

E: But like, we are

K: No but if you even have the slightest bit of historical knowledge about the country we live in...Like if you're in denial of that fact, you probably need to take a long hard look in the mirror and ask yourself why you feel that way

E: And I also don't want anyone coming at us saying that I'm comparing race with medical treatment or that I'm ignoring that intersections of race and disability. Like please don't think that!

K: Let's make this explicit: literally about the words in the hashtag guys

E: Yeah like I'm literally pointing to it as a positive example of words and language choice. And I know these are murky waters and I already feel myself worrying about making someone angry, but the thing is that...You know, I'm having trouble with this, I've had trouble with it my whole life, but here I am expressing a dissenting opinion, not going with the masses over here like that's scary for me to do but I feel pretty strongly about this because I rely so heavily on doctors that I don't want them to be further alienated when all we're trying to do is educate. I wish I had some measurable way of figuring out who is actually receiving the messages that people are saying. Who's really listening? Who's like...I'm sure there are tons of people who are stepping back, tons of doctor and nurses, medical professionals who are stepping back and who are like, "Wow I really do need to listen, I've probably been that dickhead to a disabled person." So if that's the effect that it has? Like that's super!

K: Yeah, I mean, I would still change the messaging but that's great if that's the effect that it has, good then I'm all for that.

E: No, I wouldn't change the message, i would just change the framing!

K: Oh sorry, you're right I misspoke. I mean look, without doctors I would be dead, and then if I had that one and no other ones I wouldn't be able to walk, and if I had *that* one and no other ones, I would be living in chronic pain everyday. So, sorry, I don't mean all doctor's a doctor, but I can't get behind this in the way that my community would like.

E: Yeah. Like I keep thinking about the doctor who finally performed the surgery that basically is the reason I'm here now. He had to basically like straighten out my cervical spine and it was just this really complicated mess that I'm not gonna get into. But like, I remember when I first saw him. He made me so angry, I was just so enraged because he was hemming and hawing as to whether he could actually do the surgery and things like that and I was so mad and I had already gone through terrible experiences with other doctor connected to this same surgery that I needed to have and so i was just exasperated at that point. But then he called my family and he was like, "I realized I can do the surgery," And then he proceeded to make a 3D model of my spine, put it on his desk, share my X-Rays and my MRIs with colleagues in different countries, stare at the model of my spine like every night before he went to bed, and come up with a workable plan to basically save my neck...literally. So yeah, I'm gonna #NotAllDoctors that guy. I am.

K: I mean, there are certain professions that I do believe that the vast majority of people doing them are good, I really do. Like everyone knows a teacher who hates teaching and who hates

children, and of course there's going to be some doctors out there, and there's always going to be some exception to every rule, but I really, and this might be naive of me but I really do think that if you go through the trouble of becoming a doctor, you just want to do good for the most part. Maybe that's silly of me to think but it's not like it's an easy thing to do. You know if you go through all that trouble you clearly wanna help. And if you do wanna help then it won't kill you to listen, you know? It really won't! That's like part of helping is hearing patients when they air their grievances to you about how you treated them or the lack of accessibility in their office is a huge one for people with disabilities! And just various other things like that. So I just feel the need just like you to keep saying that like we do understand the motivation behind the hashtag itself. And those motivations are...

E: ...And *so many people* have defended the hashtag. Sorry, I interrupted.

K: Oh no, you can interrupt me all you want, you can always interrupt me, I'm gonna say that right now on the record!

E: Oh! Okay good, you've heard it here first everyone! No, it has taken off and I get why, and I don't want anyone to think that I'm a doctor apologist over here. I'm really not!

K: That's a new one, that's a new one! I like that, I like that.

E: Basically it's coming down to three words, it's coming down to a hashtag for me. And I just find myself frustrated because (*sighs*) I try to approach thing differently and...maybe I'm the one doing it wrong, maybe I'm the one that needs to start saying, "Hey you're being a dickhead, can you treat me better?" I don't know. Like am i missing something here?

K: But if you said that to a doctor it would take them back a peg. That's all it would do. It's not the same as yelling with doctors as a concept on the internet. If you had a bad one to one interaction, if you're sitting in the room with your doctor and you're saying, "Hey! You're treating me like a dickhead!" Any doctor worth their salt will immediately be like shocked and I hope sit down and ask you why. But when you grab a megaphone and you scream that phrase through it, what are you actually saying? And I know that there's tweets attached to the hashtag that have very valid grievances, that's not what I'm saying. I'm just saying that if you're saying that to your doctor who is being a dickhead, you have the opportunity to make them learn how not to be a dickhead. When you scream it at doctors, you're not doing that.

E: The abyss.

K: Yeah. All you're doing is screaming. And for valid reasons. Again, for the billionth time, for valid reasons. But at the end of the day that is what you're doing.

E: I'm struggling with this one!

K: Yeah, it's a hard one, it's a hard one, everybody.

E: Well because I'm usually on board with what goes on on Disability Twitter, I can get behind a good hashtag.

K: I mean we have! I think is the first one we've talked about, but I mean we're no strangers to Disability hashtag activism! It's what we do!

E: And I love a provocative hashtag. Like I still think that #CripTheVote is provocative because so many people are still hung on like, "Excuse me? Crip...Cripple...What? Is that appropriate? Push the envelope! Yeah, that's awesome"

K: Yeah that's...We should've used that one! We shouldn't have used Black Lives Matter

E: Well you know what it's okay.

K: Yeah it's alright. I think our listeners are good enough that they would understand what we were getting at. I have faith in them.

E: Yeah that I was by no means comparing Disability Justice to Racial Justice or comparing the black experience to the white, disabled experience or anything like that.

K: Yeah cause it's true! That is provocative enough where if you're someone that thinks that 'Crip' is a bad word...I'm on the record for saying that I don't particularly like it for myself, but I'm also on the record of saying that I don't care if you use it. And so it's one of those things that sounds provocative and it makes you stop. But 'Crip' isn't 'Dickhead.' 'Dickhead' is never not an insult in some way, you know? And that's just where the disconnect is for me. Because when you say 'Crip' it's like, you get someone to stop scrolling and in the best case scenario they think, "Oh, wait...why does that sound bad to me?" I mean, they know that it does sound bad but they don't know why. You know and maybe they think, "Oh, used to mean this' or, "I associate that word with this." But you're not gonna associate 'dickhead' with anybody but that kid who tripped you one the playground in third grade because that's the first time you thought of that feeling of being a dickhead but you didn't have that word to describe it yet!

(Emily giggles)

K: No, really, really!

E: No yeah. And I'm also waiting for someone to be like, "You're not supposed to take this literally!" Or something like that. But I am taking it literally

K: But people are though! Like how else are we supposed to take it? A metaphorical dickhead... is still a dickhead.

(Both laugh)

K: No really! It's not like...

E: Whereas like "crip," is an identifying term,

K: Yeah

E: Yeah it's like an identity, it's like a thing. Like I call myself a cripple!

K: Right! That's why that argument doesn't work. I'm with ya, I gotcha.

E: This is just stressing me out because...

K: Emily, what are we gonna do?

E: About the world? I have no idea!

K: I'm sorry. Why is this stressing you out? I was lamenting to you

E: *(Giggles)* Because I am a words person. I am always, always, always trying to get behind a good message. And I always, always, always care about the framing. That's what it comes down to, that's it. That's all. And now I am going to quite honestly sit here until you put this podcast out on pins and needles that I'm going to make someone mad. That's just how I am!

K: Oh! Speaking of framing and messaging, if you've listened this far then you might be interested to know that clearly you're into words and framing. Nike is removing the word "Suffering" that Evolution 0m made for Justin I don't know how to say his last name?

E: Gallegos I think?

K: There you go. The Nike runner that we spoke about on our last episode about also language and framing. He expressed his distaste for the word 'suffering' as well and as far as we know right now, the video will be taken down and reuploaded at some point without the word 'suffering' in there. So, you know we also know that squeaky wheels get grease.

E: Also, words matter.

K: Do you have any Final Takeaways

E: My final takeaway is that I'm hesitant to continue speaking out because I don't want it to devolve into a "Why can't we all just get along?" kind of thing. So where I'm at right now is that I

wish we can meet in the middle, I understand that people have been burned too many times by doctors to make that a reality, and that doctors, many of them don't make an effort to meet us where we're at or to understand us or to take us seriously. I want to see that change more than anybody, I just think we have to think about or approach a little bit.

K: That was a fantastic Final Takeaway so I don't even have a follow up that could even compete a little bit with that. But what I will ask you, Emily and excuse me for this being a slightly personal question to ask you over the internet, but do you have any dickhead appointments coming up?

E: *(Laughs)* Um why yes, I do. With the same doctor who asked me if I could get pregnant!

K: That is most unfortunate.

E: Yeah. So don't you think for a minute that I don't fully agree with the sentiment at hand. Cause when people say stuff like that I do!

K: And on that note, this has been another episode of The Accessible Stall. I'm Kyle, she's Emily, remember to have your pets spayed or neutered, and...

E: *(laughs)* What?

K: And might we say, you look...I saw the Price is Right today in the barber shop and Drew Carey says it at the end of every episode so it's been in my head all day!

E: Does he really?

K: Yes he does, and Bob Barker did it before him!

E: What if you want puppies?

K: It's to control the stray pet population. That's what he says, apparently.

E: Oh okay, alright. I did not know that

K: And might we say you look fantastic today? And if you didn't know that, now you do!
Goodnight everybody

E: Thanks so much for listening

K: See ya next time

Both: Bye!!