

TAS: Episode 63

Insporn, Nike and Framing

E: Hi I'm Emily Ladau

K: And I'm Kyle Khachadurian

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

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E: So I'm pretty sure that a good number of our listeners have gotta be among the nineteen million plus people who have seen the video of the guy with Cerebral Palsy?

K: I have no idea what you're talking about! I'm lying right now.

E: Right. You're not among the nineteen million, that's fine.

K: Yes I am.

E: So if you haven't seen it, long story short is a guy with CP, I believe his name is Justin? Is that correct?

K: That sounds right, we'll fact check it.

E: He is a runner-- a good runner! And he gets to the end of the race, he reaches the finish line and a camera crew is there and Nike surprises him with a professional contract. And he is ecstatic, he falls to his knees and he starts bawling and when you're watching it it's like, "I'm not crying, you're crying!"

K: Yeah!

E: "I was chopping onions!" "I have an eyelash!" But it's such an empowering video, and honestly the first time I watched it, I watched it with the sound off because I was in public and I think that might've been the best way for me to watch it. Because (*sighs*) when we turned the sound on, it's suddenly this sweeping, emotional piano music and it just doesn't match the video at all!

K: Yeah, it's so jarring! And that started a discussion between Emily and I as to whether or not this is inspiration porn. But then we were like wait a minute, how bout we talk about what constitutes inspiration porn and how things like this can be framed so that it can be interpreted as such or not. And that seemed way more interesting, really.

E: Yeah well, cause I sent the link to you. I assumed you had seen it already, but this is how Kyle and I talk about things--we'll just send links back and forth to each other and then have conversations about it. And so I sent him that link and I said that I really liked it, and he was actually surprised!

K: Yeah I said to Emily I was like, "I would have totally assumed that you would hate it!" And I specifically mentioned that it's because of the music. And she had no idea what I was talking about until she watched it later.

E: Yeah so then I put it on with the music and I think it just has this whole different effect on the video and it's really rubbing me the wrong way because I guess I picture something as badass as a guy with CP getting signed with a professional running contract to have like heavy metal rock music or like, "Eye of the Tiger" or something like that

K: Or like, "The Final Countdown," by Europe

E: Yes!

K: No but really, it's so weird and but then that got me thinking, "Okay, that was obviously a very conscious choice by Nike to put that music in there."

E: Was it Nike who made that video though? This is what I'm trying to figure out.

K: Who made the video?

E: Yeah, I saw the Nike through Sports Illustrated so I wasn't sure who the actual make was.

K: Okay, the producers of the video. Right, it might not have been Nike who put the video out. But whoever made the video made a very conscious choice to put that music in. And it makes me wonder like, that was done on purpose, and was that done for the purpose of getting more views? Do you think that if that video had that cool rock music or "Eye of the Tiger" or "The Final Countdown" that it wouldn't have gotten so many views in such a short amount of time. I don't know, and that bothers me.

E: I feel like it would've gotten more, I don't know, I'm not a video producer. But what I am is a disabled person who sees a disabled guy signed to an athletic company and I'm like, "Yeahhhhh that's so cool!" And then I hear it with the music and I'm like, "Oh, I don't think that

was the reaction I'm supposed to be having, I'm supposed to be sobbing now." And yeah, it got me emotional watching him fall to his knees and start crying.

K: But it's not because you were sad, it's because you were happy for the guy for fulfilling his dream. Like you're inspired by a guy...

E: Yeah we have to talk about why...

K: Yeah we will don't worry, I just felt like saying that. And that got Emily and I thinking that the way that people like us, not as "Professional Disabled People" like we often say as a joke on this podcast, but as disabled people. When we watch videos like that, it's almost guaranteed that the reaction that we have is not the reaction that we perhaps ought to have or would have if we weren't disabled. You know what I mean? And it's so bizarre. Because this one was really close to getting it right, to merging the two worlds I suppose.

E: Yeah, exactly. Like I saw so many of my friends on Facebook, especially friends who have Cerebral Palsy, who were sharing it and saying that they were getting emotional because representation matters. And I don't think that that was the message that the other million, gazillion people who were watching the video were taking away from it, and that just makes me sad.

K: And I was saying to Emily too....because this did start as a conversation about inspo porn specifically before we decided to merge it into this. It's almost sort of a given that disabled people are not the targets for Inspo Porny type stuff. Almost sort of given. Because we're not the ones who are going to like it. But then I was like, "Okay, but if somebody who has a small child with CP sees that video and gets inspired for all the wrong reasons, but the result of that is that they see their kid as someone able to do anything that they want, is it really that bad?" And I can't answer that question either because I'm not a parent. But that's hard, I don't even know how I feel about either answer to that question.

E: I'm not even sure exactly what I'm saying, but just for the sake of conversation, what are the wrong reasons? And who are we to say that they're the wrong reasons?

K: That's a good point!

E: And granted, I do feel like there are wrong reasons to...

K: No, no but let us unpack. There's a lot to unpack here!

E: There's a lot to unpack here.

K: I would say that you can't really control what inspires you.

E: For sure. I mean, that's actually the argument that a lot of people give to me, which is, "Who am I to say what emotional response they have to something."

K: Yeah, but I would say that we're not complaining about the response itself. I think what we complain about when we talk about things like Inspo Porn is the complete and utter lack of follow through with their newfound emotion. Like, "Oh it made you feel something and what are you gonna do about it?" "Oh, nothing!" Oh, well we're not there to make you feel good, Susan. There was a point to what you were watching, you just didn't get it.

E: Or the flip side of that where they feel so bad for us and they're like, "Oh, I'm so glad that my life is not that bad" or whatever. So it's just like, I feel like the larger points go over people's heads. And so in this case, while you probably have people like, "Oh My God, it is so inspiring to see a disabled guy running!" Like, sit back for like five minutes and think about why you think that's inspiring. You think that's inspiring because you don't see that. Why don't you see that? Because we still have the attitude that it's inspiring. It's like a cyclical thing.

K: And, to extend your point even further and to muddy the waters even more. I am someone with CP. I was inspired as Sh\*t! (*laughs*) I was!

E: Rightfully so!

K: No, but I was inspired because I can't do that. And to see someone who...It was different CP, but it was still CP...It was like, "Oh! Well I can't do that but it's good to know that people like me can do that!" You know what I mean? It was cool! It was like, "Oh, look! It's one of my people!"

E: Yeah, and it also there was no sense of coddling either. It was literally like, "We're from Nike, here's a contract!" And yeah there was some fanfare, but deserved...I mean he had just finished a race, you know?

K: And I remember the Nike guy saying something to the effect of, "Oh, when we see you we just see an athlete." And I thought about that for awhile, I really did. Because that initially bothered me....and then I was like, "Why?" Like it initially bothered me and then I couldn't figure out a reason for it to. And then I figured like, "Okay well if I can't figure out a reason why that really bothers me then it really shouldn't." Initially I was apprehensive because it was like, "Oh you know, if you don't see the CP then you're not seeing all of me." But I don't really think that that was the case in that situation. I think you know, the Nike guy was just saying like, "Doesn't matter. You're still you, and you're still an athlete."

E: And you're one of us now!

K: "And you're one of us!" Yeah, exactly. You know, "You're gonna make us good money, kid!"

E: Yeah, it's a good marketing stunt I guess, but I didn't really get the marketing stunt vibe. If anything, I got the marketing stunt vibe from the video.

K: Yeah I was being cynical

E: Oh, I know.

K I think Nike was doing the right thing. I think Nike was doing the right thing. But also like, if authentic representation leads to more money for major companies, good. It's a win-win.

E: But also, why are we....and this a general observation about society, honestly. Why are we so hung up on doing the right thing. Why is it that including disabled people is still the right thing to do and not just the thing to do? Do you get my distinction?

K: Listen, I absolutely hear you, and you're right. It's almost like, "Oh, why don't we live in a post-racial America yet?" And the answer is, cause we don't. There are things that should and shouldn't be that unfortunately or fortunately depending on what it is, just are. And you're right, I don't think that it should be the right thing to include people with disabilities in things. It should just be how it is. But in 2018, it's not unfortunately.

E: Yeah

K: And so, although I really do feel like that sometimes you shouldn't get credit for things that you ought to do, I feel that sometimes it's so seldom done that as much as I don't want to give you a cookie for doing the right thing, here's your cookie so that you know to keep doing the right thing.

E: I think that's fair. And I think in this case for this particular video, I'm really hoping that's inspired all nineteen million people to see disabled people as worthy of inclusion and to...

K: I'll settle for just one!

E: You know what? Yeah! My goals were a little too lofty there. But in some cases what I think with thing that are inspiration porn, I still at least feel that there can be a positive outcome from it. And in this case, I feel like there can definitely be a positive outcome. The problem is I want to get to a point where this doesn't have to be news. And I think in reflecting on that, I just have to accept that we're not living in a world where stuff like this is not not newsworthy yet. At least though, and this was another distinction that we were making when we were initially talking about this.... This is so different than those videos where Girl With Down Syndrome is voted Prom Queen.

K: Yeah, like I don't think this video is Inspiration Porn, I think it could be misconstrued as Inspiration Porn.

E: Because of framing, yeah.

K: Yeah. Whereas, "Hot Team Quarterback asks Cute Down Syndrome Girl to Prom" is always Inspo Porn, and also never news. I'll even, I'll disagree with you a little bit. I'll say that this particular thing, you're right it shouldn't be news, I guess. But if there ever was like I'm okay with that. Cause it's weird, it's weird! You don't see people with CP getting professionally signed to be brand ambassadors or professional runners.

E: Oh, for sure. I mean, it is newsworthy because of the world that we live in.

K: And perhaps it shouldn't be one day. But I'm okay with things that shouldn't be newsworthy being newsworthy, in the context of this world that we live in today.

E: Yeah. And the other thing that I thought about too is, it's always newsworthy when someone gets some kind of professional contract or something as an athlete. So I mean maybe not 19 million views of inspiration worthy, but certainly always news in the sports world when someone gets a contract, right?

K: Even when they get traded. Like they can already be who they are. Like if LeBron James joined another team tomorrow, that would be on the front page of the sports section.

E: Kyle does not like sports.

K: Yeah, I- I don't

*(Emily laughs)*

K: Could you tell?

E: I mean, I pretend to like sports

K: Seriously though. If a household name of an athlete traded teams or retired or anything like that, that's would be all you would hear about in today's Sports News. So it's not just "Oh we found the new guy and he has CP and look it's really cool." I'm saying that Sports News gets eyeballs anyway.

E: Yeah absolutely. I mean that is always in the news, that's always something that's part of the news cycle. And so in that way I think that this is not different than any other news story you would see about an athlete getting a contract. But then you have, I think you have at the beginning of the video it says something like, "He suffers from Cerebral Palsy" I know that

people get so annoyed at Professional Disabled People™ for getting hung up on semantics but that boy don't look like he's suffer.

K: Look. I know cause I used to be this guy. I know that you're gonna say. Well maybe not you because you're listening...but in case you don't. I know that the second definition of "to suffer" means, "to be affected by" and to have Cerebral Palsy you are literally speaking, suffering from it. I know that. But the first definition is commonly associated with things that are negative. And I wouldn't even be complaining about that if there weren't thirty other synonyms used in place of that that convey the same exact message more clearly. And because there is, just don't use it. Okay? It's not one of those things that I'm gonna argue to death with, but it's just one of those little things where if we all stopped doing it, maybe we could change the stigma of it a little bit.

E: Yeah like how hard is it to say, "Has?"

K: Or, "Lives with?" or, "Was born with?"

E: I mean that's the kind of thing that just gives me a headache. Because every time I read or watch a good video or good journalism and get otherwise excited about the coverage of a story...And then you see like "Wheelchair bound," or "Suffers from" or "Confined to" and it's like "Oh, you were so close! So close!"

K: And I will say that Emily and I definitely, and we still do...We butt heads. Because I'm of the opinion that as long as your messaging was otherwise good, that really doesn't matter. But I will say that if there's anything else that's off with that language choice? Then it just amplifies the fact that you messed up. So, you know what I mean?

E: Yeah.

K: Like if that's the only mistake you made? Then it's like, "Hey, this is good but next time do this." But if there's *anything* else wrong it truly stands out like a sore thumb. Because then you can make the argument that, "Oh, they messed up their facts because they're ignorant and don't know the correct terminology" right?

E: I'm trying really hard to come around to the logic that it's the message overall rather than the means by which it was communicated.

K: Well no, that's not true for everything. You know, I don't believe that for everything but I'm saying I don't let a fictional, otherwise good piece of writing that I otherwise agree with, get ruined by a bad choice.

E: Yeah this is not really related to the whole Inspiration Porn thing, but in terms of language choice...

K: Language choice is framing!

E: No it's true you're right, it is framing. And so I went to see a play that my friend got me a ticket to, and she told me the play had a couple questionable lines in it that were Disability related and then clarified the play was from 1995 and you know, try to like not let these lines bother you. And I was thinking and I said, "You know I'm not gonna let two lines of a play from like 20 years affect my overall enjoyment." And I think that that's important too just as long as the framing is not taking away from the overall message of something. So you know, that's a good thing but in this case, going back to the video, I feel like the music does take away from the overall message. Maybe not the word, "Suffers from"

K: "Suffers from" I didn't even notice.

E: Oh I think about this stuff all the time. Especially because remember I was watching it without the sound. So I was just looking for other things.

K: But you were just looking for other things because you saw the word "suffer." I will say that in terms of something being old...Like in terms of something being old and has bad language choice or metaphors or jokes or whatever, I am of the very firm belief that those should be left alone for nothing else other than a reminder of where we came from versus where we are. I think those things are extremely important.

E: "Look at where we are..."

K: "Look at where we started..." You know you gotta always out a *Hamilton* reference in there somewhere. I wanted to and I didn't, but man you did it for me.

K: You know, I don't even think it should be glorified. I don't want to call it "Preserving History" that sounds too douche-y. But there is value in seeing the progress that you don't see living life day by day. You know, no one notices the world changing day after day but if you saw something twenty years ago you can look at it now and say, "Well obviously that's not cool!" That's just showing you that you've grown up.

E: Yeah it's the evolution of thought. And I think that the fact that we have companies like Nike signing people with CP, is an overall societal evolution of thought. And I think it's fantastic and I'm real pumped about it and I guess my hope at the end of the day is that other people can be pumped about it too, but you know, not in the sense that they grab their hanky and then click, "Share." You know I really, really hope that it motivates someone to see the worth of someone with a disability.

K: I'm gonna be a little bit cynical here...

E: Yeah?

K: Just a little bit. I think if you can look at a video, of a man completing what I think is a marathon or whatever it was. It was a long run and he was sweating, and he was like you know drenched and he was exhausted and huffing and puffing and you can look at that man and you can cry tears of, "Oh my God, sadness, inspiration, I'm really happy I'm not like him." Then there's little that we can do to change your mind. Because that it missing the point.

E: Alternatively, how do you feel about the people who are like, "Oh my God, he's crippled and he lives a miserable life and he can do that, so what's my excuse?" How do you feel about those people?

K: Um, okay. I've actually always thought about this but I don't actually think that I've ever articulated my feelings. I do not blame able-bodied people for thinking that being disabled is the worst way to live. Because, that...and I mean you can write a paper about all the reasons why that might be... But one of the bigger ones is, that's what's reflected back at them in the world. And also, not for nothing, but being disabled tends to happen to older people more than younger people because of age and it sort of reminds people of their mortality and they don't want to think of that. So I understand why somebody wouldn't want to be disabled, I really do. Like, I'm not defending them but I totally understand that mindset. but the "What's my excuse thing is a funny thing is a funny thing because if that actually did motivate and inspire someone to get up off the couch from being a couch potato and go to the gym every day and better themselves? Eh, good I guess. Rooted in bad reasons, but a good outcome. It's like, take it or leave it. But if that person just commented that and like stuck his fist in a bowl of Cheetos and shoved like eighteen of them in his face and booted up *World of Warcraft*, it's like, "You didn't need to say that, Tim. You didn't mean it." I don't know, those people are strange. I have a very weird relationship with those people.

E: I think that makes complete sense. Yeah. I mean, my mom sustained an injury the other day...I hate to tell her story for her but I'll keep it as vague as possible. And then someone said to her, "You already deal with so much! And now you have this injury on top of it? Like, I could never do it!" Or something like that. And it's just like, "Stop it Sandra!" That wasn't her name. But apparently we need to give everyone names in this episode. (laughs)

K: I was gonna say, like I understand, I really do understand why someone would say that Disability is something to deal with. But what they don't understand, especially in our cases, and I imagine in many of our listeners cases, is... we were born this way, we're not dealing with anything.

E: Well, we are dealing with things but often it's the dare I say, bullshit that's put in our way by the able-bodied world.

K: Fair enough. You're right.

E: Social Model view

K: We really should talk about that

E: Well the problem is, you can't have an isolate conversation about Inspiration Porn because it is so inextricably linked to so many larger aspects of Disability conversation. Although I will say that part of me really wishes that I didn't have to use the word "Porn," not because I care about it...

K: No, I care about it.

E: You know what? I really don't, but like I remember I was trying to explain this concept to a group of students in a class that I was teaching, and they were older, they were adults. And one of them was very uncomfortable with the word, "Porn." And I feel like when we're having this conversation, having to use that word kind of causes our points to get lost.

K: Yeah, I mean, that's why I don't like it. Personally I don't care. But I'm not the one who has to care. The person who has to care is the person who doesn't know these things, and who is also willing to learn. And it's not that hard for me to imagine a scenario, wherein somebody who's willing to learn otherwise hears a word that they don't like-- like they're already inching out of their comfort zone by sitting in the classroom listening, and then you say a word that they haven't like for decades, and that's it they go right back in and they shut down, and they stop listening. And you lost them...and it's not even your fault! Like personally, I don't care, I'll say "Porn" everyday, it's just a word. But like, the people who need to learn these things might care. And what can you do? That's the term that we all agreed to. You know, it's so bizarre. This is something that I don't like because there's no good answer.

E: No, and that was not the central point that we're trying to make here, but it does make having these conversations a little more challenging.

K: Having said that, I don't think many of our listeners really care about the word "Porn." DO you, guys? Let us know!

E: I actually do wanna know!

K: Yeah, that was a serious "Let us know!"

E: Yeah and I also really wanna know what everyone thinks about the video too, because this was an interesting one for me because usually I tend to go at depictions of disability kind of guns blazing I guess and like, "This was straight up Inspiration Porn and this was terrible and blah blah blah blah blah." But I'm also very willing to talk about the nuances to unpack the nuances if you will... of representation. And in this case I think that the value of representation 100% outweighs the flaws of the video if you want to put it that way. I think the flaws are few.

K: Yeah, I think that if you just replaced the soundtrack. I mean, I know there's also "suffering" in there, but at least that one is literally, dictionary, accurate. But the music is just too much.

E: And I feel like there are examples like this all the time...

K: Oh yeah.

E: I'm sure if I took a few minutes to comb through the archives of things I have looked at, I would have come up with other examples of videos that were otherwise good, but you know could stand to have a few things changed. Like in this case, the music. Like, come on guys with the music. Really?

K: This reminds me... I don't know why... It's semi-related but there was this video going around recently of this MMA fighter with CP.

E: Oh yeah?

K: Yeah. They put him in the ring.

E: I don't think I saw that.

K: He was a total badass. I'll see if I can find it and if I can, I'll put it in the description. But he had a problem, and his problem was nobody was hitting him! Nobody wanted to hurt the disabled guy

E: That's a bummer!

K: Yeah but it's like, he made it there!

E: Yeah so clearly he has some worth, you know.

K: Yeah you think they'd just like plop fighting gear on random disabled people and throw them into a freakin' cage match? That's not how this works!

E: Oh that's annoying...

K: But he felt bad for himself! He's like, "No, I made it, let me participate c'mon hit me!"

E: Yeah like, "Fight me!" Yeah but really I would feel exactly the same way, like come on man!

K: And then the other thing too is I just wanna give a quick shout out to Nike. This is not the first time they've been or tried to be inclusive. They made those shoes that were all the rage in the CP Community a year or two ago.

E: Oh yeah!

K: And frankly, I didn't like the shoes at all, but it had nothing to do with the shoes, it was just the fact that you put them on differently than most shoes and all the muscle memory for putting on shoes for twenty years was a bit...it was so ingrained in me that I just couldn't learn how to do it! And also I wasn't the target kind of CP, but I will say that quirks aside, it was a very, very good effort and they should be commended for that I think.

E: Nike does some cool stuff. I think there are a lot of big brands out there that are making cool stuff. I think that a brand to look out for that are making cool things in a non- inspiration porn way is Microsoft.

K: Microsoft...Apple...

E: Apple's doing yeah, good stuff too!

K: Tommy Hilfiger

E: Oh my God, with Tommy Adaptive? Yeah.

K: I mean, I know those are just three but really those are all brands you've definitely heard of, and that's good. We always talk about how there's so much more work to be done on this show because there is.

E: And there probably always will be.

K: And that's fine, that's fine. Because striving to live in a more perfect world is a good thing> But it's so easy when you're stuck in the mire of all this to forget that we have made *huge* amounts of progress, The ADA is only 28 years old. That's not a long time. *We're* not 28 years old! You know what I mean? We've got a ways to go but we've made so much progress already...we have.

E: Although, our age will never outrun the age of the ADA so... (*laughs*)

K: I didn't mean to frame it that way, I just mean that we're still young

E: I was like, "Whatcha getting at?"

K: Wait, your birthday doesn't count for three years this year?

(Emily laughs)

K: Gosh, there must be something wrong with me. Anyway, um any Final Takeaways?

E: Yeah, you know what? Probably not the final takeaway I would've had before we did this episode but I'm glad that this was even a video that exists that we can do an episode about. If that makes sense. So I think that my Final Takeaway is that the fact that we are getting to the point in this world where we can have conversations not about whether something is just straight up Inspiration Porn, but we can start to talk about nuances and complexities of representation of Disability? I mean, that's pretty cool.

K: This was... I don't know if this was Nike's first step truly in creating Disabled-centric content or whatever, or whoever made it...I'm sorry, we don't know if it was Nike, it's just that he was sponsored by Nike. But if it wasn't it was rough around the edges. But if it was, it was a spectacular first effort. Truly. And that is so much better than what we can say about almost every other video of this sort of caliber.

E: I think that's a good place to leave it.

K: I agree.

E: I'm just glad that we were able to have this conversation honestly.

K: Me too.

E: I mean, I'm always glad that we have Podcast conversations, but this one in particular, it's good to be able to talk about this stuff.

K: The more we talk about it, the more it sort of releases the stigma about talking about it.

E: Yes. Everything is cyclical.

K: Yeah. I mean, I don't...I'm not gonna go as far as to say the stigma around Disability as a whole, But if you're too uncomfortable to talk about X, then X will never change. You gotta start somewhere. And that's all I mean. Anyway, goodnight everybody. And remember, if you're willing and able, to please support us on Patreon for just one dollar a month, your contribution will ensure that all future episodes of *The Accessible Stall* will be transcribed.

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K: And just keep being your beautiful selves!

E: And may we say, you look good today?

K: Goodnight everybody!