



Transcript Episode 8

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0:10 Jens

Welcome to the Wyrd Thing Podcast, episode 8: Microaggressions and good intentions. My name is Jens and my co-hosts today are Jochem and Suzanne. Before we dig into the examples, I think we should talk a little bit about what a microaggression actually is. Jochem, could you tell us how you understand a microaggression?

0:31 Jochem

Yes, I could try. I find it a difficult concept because it is relatively new to me, but also because there is not a clear difference between discrimination in general and microaggressions. There is, as far as I am concerned, a large grey area between those. So I looked at Wikipedia and they said that microaggression is a term used for commonplace daily verbal, behavioural or environmental slights, whether unintentional or intentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative attitudes towards stigmatized or cultural marginalized groups. Which is a mouth full. Someone else described it as: it's the small, everyday things that happen. Those little slights that make you feel a little different or a little bit less valued than other people. And that is a definition that I can work with and that made the concept a bit more clear for myself.

1:49 Jens

OK, so we have this distinction, this not very clear distinction between microaggressions and aggressions or macroaggressions. What would you say to someone who just says: Oh, you need to live with this. This is just normal life. Learn to handle it.

02:09 Jochem

Oi. It depends on who it is and on which context they say this. When we talked about this in our last meeting you said that only the victim decides what a microaggression is. And yes and no. The thing is that microaggression often is below the threshold of the people doing or making this microaggression. Often it is unintentional so they won't notice. And that makes it difficult.

But I think it is important because those little things, if everyday 10 times I hear that I am not important or that I am valued less or that I am not worth, that crawls into my system. And after years, it can be traumatizing and can do really bad things when it comes to self-worth, the concept of self in general. So no, I don't have to deal with this or better said: I shouldn't have to deal with this kind of stuff on a daily basis.

03:39 Jens

I feel the urgent need to clarify something there. I don't mean that only the victim defines what a microaggression is. I think it's very dangerous to define it this way. But I heard people defining it like this. And I think it doesn't help us. Because you need to clarify to the aggressor in that case why this behaviour is aggressive. And on the other hand if only the victim would define what a microaggression is, we've seen this example in the news where a woman felt threatened in a park



because a Black man was walking his dog there. And even if she felt threatened that was not a microaggression. He was just walking his dog.

So there is a level where you say: That's just normal life, That's what happens. And then there is a level where maybe the aggressor doesn't realize why it's aggressive. But if you think about it and work it out, you will see why it is. And also when there so micro, sometimes for the victim it's not obvious in the first time. It becomes obvious after several times or when they realize there is a pattern to it. But I think to clarify we should go into some examples. Suzanne, could you provide us with an example for microaggressions to start with?

05:05 Suzanne

I think microaggressions, to an extent they can be very, very individual. What one person finds aggressive another one may feel that it isn't. But for me, as a queer heathen it would be somebody seeing the wedding ring on my finger and asking me what my husband does. And they may be doing that to be polite and just asking about me, about my life. But they may not realize that I don't have a husband.

And if I hear that over and over and over again, like you were saying, Jochem, it starts becoming something that you constantly deal with and you can start thinking that way. I everyone tells me, they're implying that I should have a husband than I start to think about society assumes I must have one. So I think that for me would be microaggression but for somebody else, they might not see it the same way.

06:17 Jochem

Yeah. I have heard all kinds of variations on the theme: I would have never guessed you are trans. What a compliment for you, isn't it? And so the message it that it is better that people can't see I am trans man than if people could see it. So trans people who can't be identified as being trans are better people than people that are obviously trans. Which is a very weird message, I think.

06:59 Jens

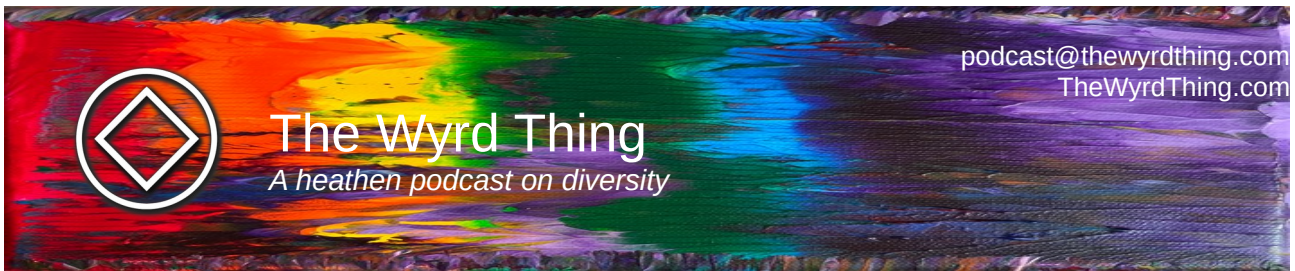
Well, it kind of erases trans people out of public space because you tell them: You must be invisible to be a good trans person.

07:09 Jochem

Yeah, indeed. Or the other way round, I have heard, too, that trans men will never be real men, and they didn't realize that I was a trans men. So I told them and they turned red in their face.

07:30 Jens

Oh yeah, I remember some similar episodes. I've outed myself a few times when I heard either, oh yeah, these gay people, you can recognize them by their high-pitched voice, their broken wrist gesture and all this. And I remember another episode where some well-meaning co-apprentice, it's more than 20 years ago, told me: You know, in homosexual couples always one of them takes the more female and the other takes the more male part. To which I basically replied: That's nonsense, and by the way, I am gay.



08:13 Jochem

Brilliant.

08:16 Jens

They are well meaning in this moment. Because they think they understood something. But what these people actually do is just putting homosexual relationships into the pattern they know from straight relationships. The more interesting thing is to ask them: How do you tell in a heterosexual couple who is the male and who is the female? And then you learn interesting things about their gender concepts and how they not fit reality.

08:48 Jochem

I happen to be gay as well and when I first came out as trans, I had hormones already, and again about that male/female stuff in gay relationships, they automatically assumed that I would be the female one because I am trans. So that was two weird assumptions. And annoying assumptions.

09:20 Jens

Oh yes, that definitely meant, it didn't relate to what you wanted to be. They pushed you back into your old role which you tried to change.

09:29 Jochem

Yes, exactly. And that has, again, the assumption in it that again, trans men will never become real men. Which isn't true, either. . Suzanne, do you have some more examples?

09:47 Suzanne

I think the ones that I have from within a faith context, a context of heathenry was being asked to go and do a child's naming ceremony. Sort of arriving and being able to set up and everything else. And after I've done the ceremony one of the male guests came up and said that they had assumed that I wasn't going to be the celebrant because I was a woman. And he didn't think that women could be celebrants in our faith. That was, yeah, that stopped me in my tracks for a minute.

10:28 Jens

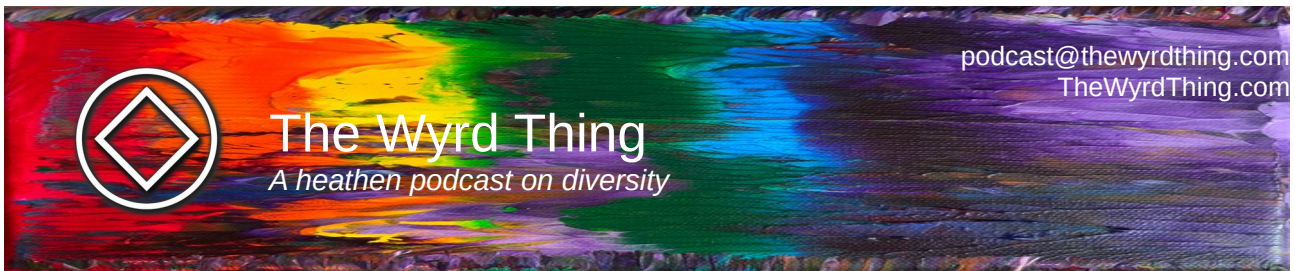
That sounds more like a macroaggression to me.

10:30 Suzanne

Yeah. Luckily, I didn't hit him. Because I was being paid to be there and I didn't want to leave a bad impression on the other guests. But he said, you know, I've a very good job considering, and I was like – OK. Sometimes when things like that happen, you don't know how to respond to them. That can give that other person almost an encouragement to continue doing it, almost, continue holding that opinion because they take your silence as an understanding that it's okay. So he had a very strong and specific opinion which he was quite happy to share. And sometimes, you know, that time I didn't know what to do with it.

11:23 Jochem

I can imagine that you don't know how to respond to that kind of really old-fashioned statement.



11:36 Suzanne

It was. It was a very old-fashioned, very gender traditional gender role statement. And the first time it happened, I didn't know what to do with it. Sometimes, when Kate and I have been going out to places our friends that have known us or people that have known us and seen us around the community for a very long time will go up to Kate and go: You know, I can't tell, if I didn't know, I wouldn't be able to tell that you hadn't been born that way.

And I am just like: Ow. So, or the ones that are very well meaning and will call her by her dead name. Or continue to use that dead name. And that's a very tricky one for us, because we accept that people can make mistakes especially with somebody that you have known for a very long time who has changed their name. But when it continues happening and then continues happening or they say: Oh, you will always be so-and-so to me and uses the dead name, then we take that as a microaggression. Because it's not recognized.

12:47 Jens

I was about to ask: When does it move from being just a mistake to becoming a microaggression to becoming a macroaggression?

13:05 Jochem

Yeah, indeed. Good question.

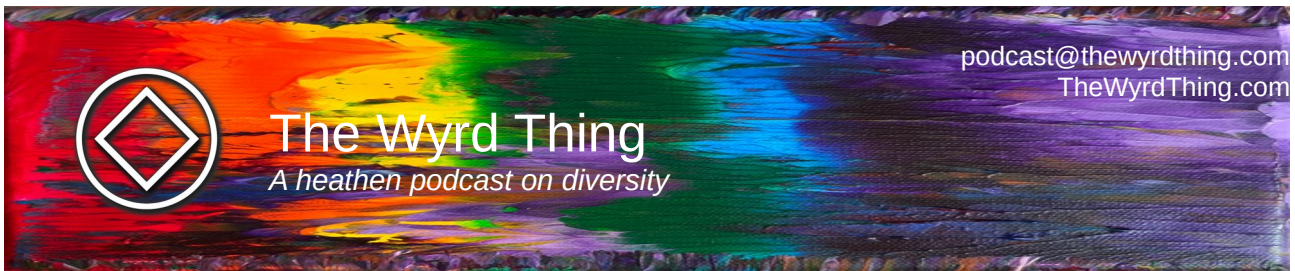
13:07 Suzanne

I think, for us, one or two times is a mistake. And after that, it goes into being a microaggression of: Oh, yes, I am sorry, I'll use the right name and using the correct name. But if they are deliberately and continuously using the old name and they are sort of not taking any – if we correct them and say: Oh, you need to use this name and pronouns now, and that is not respected, then it becomes a very big aggression.

13:41 Jochem

Yeah, I agree. I could always feel the difference between people who were really trying but made a honest mistakes, and people who didn't get it or didn't want to get it and therefore made „mistakes“, because they basically were ignoring my identity. Luckily, when taking testosterone, I think in a year time, when I was walking on the street, people of course saw a man because testosterone is a really strong hormone and is doing all the physical changes. And I noticed at that time my boss at my work was finding it really difficult to accept, and he was making „mistakes“ even two years later. And it became very embarrassing.

The interesting thing was that in the beginning I didn't feel seen and I felt annoyed. But the longer it took the more it became embarrassing for him when we were with co-workers. They all knew because it was a very small team. But they all accepted it except for my boss. And even when we were on the street or outside somewhere, people were looking weird at him why he would say she or her to a man. So he was the weird one. And that was for me satisfying see and to realize, because it really, again, ate away my self-worth and my feelings dignity. Because it was humiliating. And that helped me noticing that he was seen as weird and not me. That helped me not to feel violated by him. Almost I felt sort of pity for my boss because this sad man can't accept it. So it turned around, luckily. But that took some time.



16:20 Jens

I think that's very important to hear this, to talk about it. I also feel we're slightly losing our focus on the good intentions part. Does anyone of you can provide a good intentions example going bad or going the wrong way?

16:35 Jochem

Oh yes. Yes. I am really triggered by good intentions. Because a lot of the time and especially when it comes to having a disability – all kinds of people, people on the street or people of all kind of services makes assumptions about what I am able to do and what I am not able to do. And they offer help, often without asking. It's really, really annoying and it makes me really angry.

An example is, one time I was travelling to England or to the UK for a queer pagan camp. I was in my wheelchair having 3 bags with me. One on the back of my wheelchair, one on my lap and one rolling behind my wheelchair, tied to my wheelchair of course. So it was a lot of luggage and I was in between. And one person asked when I was in the train and it was time to step out of the train and she asked me: 'Can I help you?' And I said: 'No, thanks. I am waiting for someone to help me to step out.' And that has to be someone working with the trains, because there is some technical thing needed.

And despite my answer she grabbed the luggage from my lap and took it outside. And I needed that piece of luggage for counterbalance. So I needed to adjust my weight immediately, otherwise I would have fallen backwards because of all the luggage at the back of my wheelchair. And so I was quite annoyed and my revenge was that I let her stand outside for a while, still carrying my luggage, waiting for this person to come to help me outside. Just to show: Don't do it if I say no.

Another example is connected to all kinds of services, that every time again they assume that my head, or basically that I am stupid because I am using a wheelchair. So I am a client, so I probably won't understand all the rules and regulations. Which isn't true. Most often it is the other way round. Because I exactly know all kinds of rules and regulations for example what aid I am entitled to have. And I have to explain it to them. And they say: 'No, you don't understand it. It's like this and this and this.' And I say: 'No, you don't understand. It is written here and here and here. I am entitled to have this.'

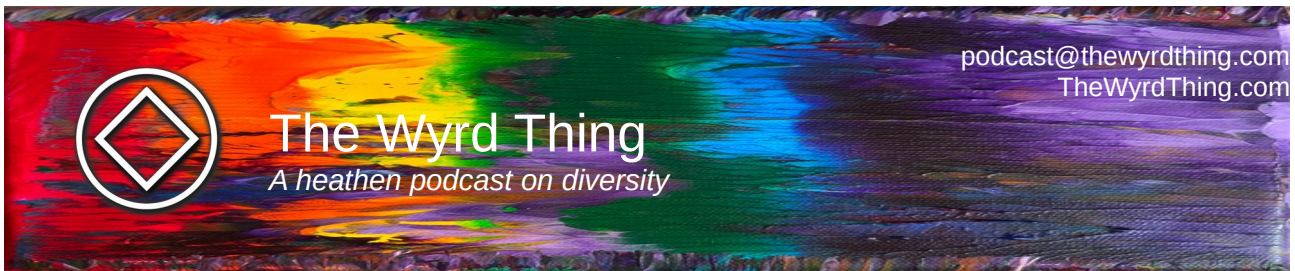
Last year, it took me four weeks of yes – no – yes – no – yes – no, before they saw that I had been right all the time. And then, coming back to the good intentions, their reply was: 'But my intentions were good. I tried to help you.' And so I replied in the direction of: 'Yes, but if you listen to me and take seriously what I say to you, then you can help me. But you have to listen to me.'

20:15 Jens

Again, I am surprised by what you classify as a microaggression and what not. Because asking you if you need help is a good thing to start with in my opinion. For me, it's really the right thing to do. Just ask. But ignoring the answer is more than just a microaggression in my opinion.

20:38 Jochem

Yeah. I was talking about good intentions and let go the microaggressions for a while. I'm not sure if that is a microaggression or a macroaggression. I felt quite frustrated about it.



20:54 Jens

On a much lower level, compared to this, honestly, another example of good intentions which turn out bad, which I probably wouldn't remember it if it had only happened once to me. But I experienced it a few times. And the general pattern is that someone, usually straight women, ask me on something like a heathen event: 'How did you meet your partner? Did you meet him here?' And it's especially this expectation: Oh, I want to hear some romantic story about this right now. How wonderfully tolerant we are that such things happen. And unfortunately, well, not unfortunately, truthfully, I have to tell her: 'No, I've met my partner under very specific gay circumstances, because that's how probably 99% of gay couples meet.' That's just still the world we're living in. And maybe it will always be the same. It's not really a big thing in my opinion.

But this expectation: I try to show interest, but actually I want to be confirmed how tolerant we all are. So that this getting to know each other for gay people happens under such circumstances sounds really odd to me. And it becomes a bit micro aggressive when I need to tell them: 'No, it's been very different.' So the most romantic version is: Some other gay friends introduced us to each other. But the truth may also be: We've met at a gay bar, in the gay sports club, on a gay dating website, which is totally normal, but does not want to be seen by people who think: Oh, we're so much at normal, it's so great. Yes, things have improved. It's good that we talk about microaggressions and not about macro aggressions. But we're not really there yet where some would like to see the society.

23:02 Jochem

I agree, yeah. How do you see that, Suzanne?

23:07 Suzanne

Yeah, I think very much that. It's very, what one person sees as a microaggression might be someone else's macro aggression. And you're right, where society is as a whole and how we are collectively learning what is not appropriate anymore and what is. The language is changing with every generation and every new understanding. And for me, I hope it will get to the point where microaggressions are not tolerated at all.

23:44 Jens

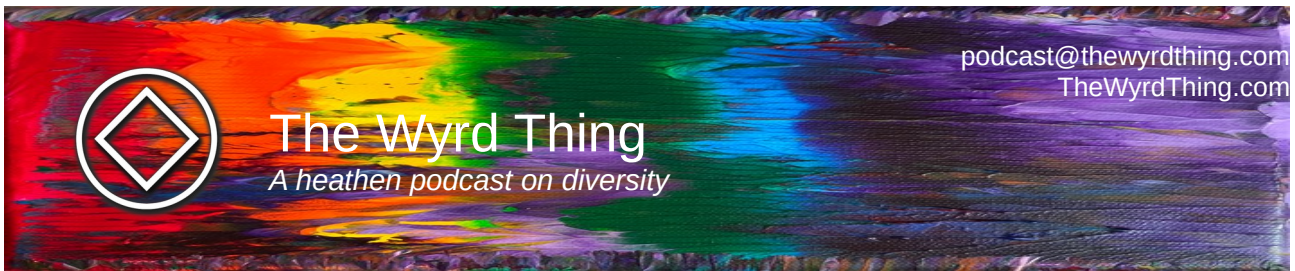
If we look back – this is meant to be a heathen podcast – to our different heathen sources, how do you see it in the sagas, in the Eddas, in the old stories?

23:57 Jochem

Maybe you two can comment on that, being real, proper heathens and I am just a floating pagan of all sorts?

24:09 Suzanne

I think for me when I am reading back through the sagas and the Eddas, I see a lot of what I would view as quite aggressive behaviour, quite direct, quite brutal in some cases. How they would view that behaviour, some of it is acceptable to them and some of it isn't because you can see their reactions in the sagas and in the myth cycle. But would they would class as acceptable and what we would I think are two different things.



24:42 Jochem

Yeah, makes sense.

24:46 Jens

So when I had a look at it and with my first idea of microaggressions are things which the aggressor is not really aware of, I had the feeling they know very well what they are doing. It's quite obviously violent. We have the Lokasenna where Loki insults basically all other gods. We have, I think it's the Harbrands poem, where Thor and Odin have kind of an insulting duel there. But when Jochem clarified the definition of microaggressions, I thought, yeah, for them this probably have been microaggressions. Or maybe it was just fun for them at that time, because they were so busy with other kinds of aggressions. But that's thousand years ago and more, and I hope that we developed a bit as a society.

25:42 Suzanne

Yes.

25:43 Jochem

I would like to think so. And it's also I realized that the time when these stories happened and the times when they were written down were very different. So there also might be translation issues involved or different understandings of how society works. As we said that how people treat each other is also depending on the culture. So what might have been appropriate in the time that these stories are may be different than the time that they were written down and definitely are different than nowadays.

26:38 Suzanne

Hm, yeah, very much so, yes.

26:41 Jochem

And I think when we talked about this episode and talking about good intentions, that there popped up I think two interesting stories that are Edda-related. Maybe one of you can tell about these stories?

27:02 Jens

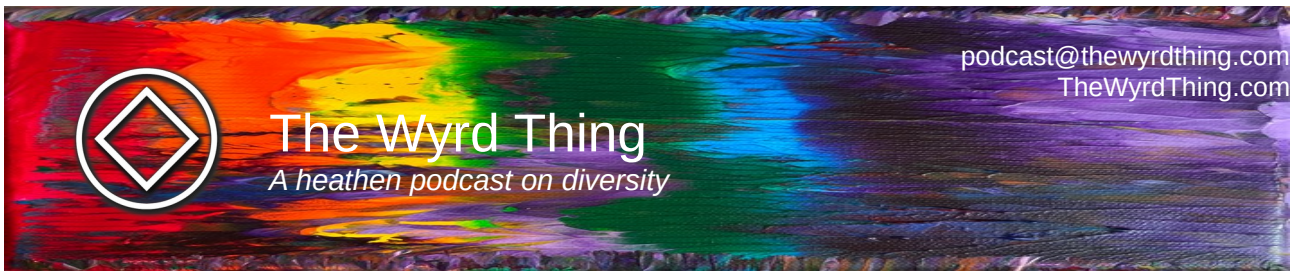
The one really obvious example for me about good intentions going terribly in the wrong direction is the story about Baldur's death. Which starts with Baldur dreaming about his death, telling his mother about it and his mother being very protective. Frigga goes to all the nine worlds and asks almost everyone and everything for an oath not to harm Baldur. She becomes very protective, that's very obviously her good intentions and with this she actually triggers the chain of events which in the end leads to Baldur's death.

27:43 Jochem

Yeah, that is a good intention going sadly wrong.

27:50 Jens

Returning to – it's Loki who is really annoyed by all this things and then really causes death. If you think about it, Loki is insulted really a lot by the other gods and so you can get to the point of view



that all these microaggressions escalate into something which ends up in the Ragnarök. So it's a good idea to slow them down and try to move into the other direction.

28:25 Jochem

Yeah. What I didn't realize but a psychologist told me that we know trauma by the big things in life. But this psychologist explained that trauma can arise from a series of microaggression as well. Because if the message year after year after is that you don't matter, that there is no place for you in this world or that your value as a human being is less than other people, than that becomes or can become traumatizing.

29:09 Jens

If you look into job life and replace trauma by burn out – they don't happen because of the one big event which is bringing people down, it's the constant overstretching of their resources, of their psychological resources.

29:28 Jochem

Hm. And then going back to Loki who is being called names by the other gods or being excluded from the group again and again and again, yes, I can imagine that Loki gets twisted in his head and doing weird or nasty things.

29:59 Suzanne

Maybe we see the results of that in the Lokasenna where he just strides into the party and starts insulting everybody with no apparent reason why. It's because all of those past experiences and he just got to that breaking point.

30:22

If I'm not wrong he's not invited to that party. He is really party crashing there because he is not invited.

30:27 Suzanne

Yeah. So maybe not getting invited is that last little bit which just causes him to snap.

30:34 Jochem

Yeah, could be. It's interesting, I never thought about this point of view connecting to that story. It's an interesting one and I am going to think about this for a while, I think.

30:51 Jens

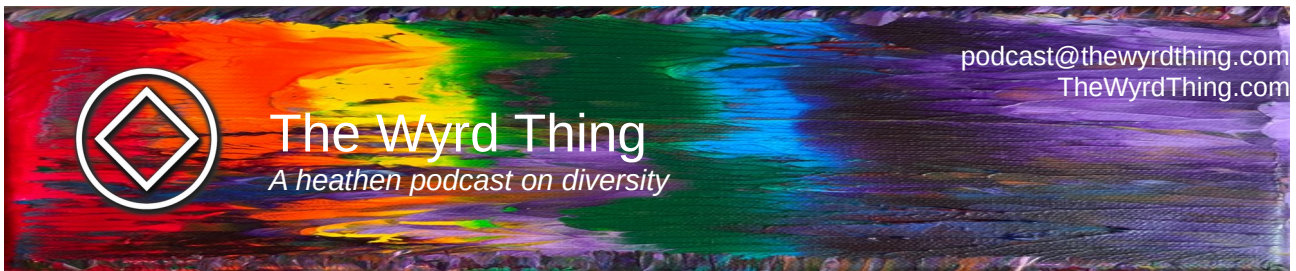
So what we have here is basically the gods are setting a bad example by piling up bad actions which in the end causes the end of the worlds.

31:02 Suzanne

As microaggressions go: Yes. It's quite a big response.

31:12 Jens

You need many of them to achieve that. But it works.



31:19 Jochem

That's the thing about the gods. That if things go wrong, they really go wrong. Because they are so strong and everything. I've seen that with the Greek gods. When I was in high school, we learned about the Greek gods and that was a bloody mess as well. They were so human in a way but always fighting around and all kinds of wars, interfering and things went wrong. And because the gods were involved, things went horribly wrong. That's interesting.

31:59 Jens

We will look into the gods more in the next episode. Is there anything one of you would like to throw into this pod cast right now or today?

32:10 Jochem

Maybe one more example of a good intention and a microaggression combined. I have been complimented that I live alone by myself while having a disability. Because people, or some people, not all people, are really surprised to learn that I am able to live without any kind of support as a wheelchair user. And sometimes they even say: Wow, that's good of you. Which is quite annoying.

32:52 Suzanne

To hear that day in and day out while you are thinking: No, I am capable of doing this, I like doing it this way. To hear other peoples assumptions that they feel that you are very brave, or that's brilliant that you are able to live alone, it shows their assumption that disabled people that they don't feel that disabled are capable of living their life independently.

33:16 Jochem

Exactly. Yes.

33:19 Jens

So, to sum up: Microaggressions may occur out of good intentions. They may be unintentional just because people don't care at all. They may be intentional and considered by the person who issues them as minor things. But where ever they come from, they pile up and they cause bigger harm than you think in the first moment.

33:49 Jochem

Yeah, I think that's a good summary.

33:52 Jens

So what we need to there is to talk with each other, to listen to each other. I'm kind of hearing Frigga here. We need to listen more. Because this really helps us to understand: What is a microaggression. How can I avoid it? We also need to listen into ourselves to see: OK, what hurts me in the long run and what maybe doesn't?

34:20 Jochem

Yeah. We need to be careful not to internalize these microaggressions and project them onto ourselves.



34:30 Suzanne

And onto other people as well.

34:34 Jochem

Exactly, yeah.

34:37 Jens

OK, Jochem, Suzanne: Thank you for this pod cast. You will hear us the next time with an episode about: The gods. And you can find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) @TheWyrdThing. Thank you for listening.

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