Opinion Science Podcast

Hosted by Andy Luttrell

Episode #17: How We Think About Animals with Kristof Dhont

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Andy Luttrell:
When I was in college, every so often a man would appear outside the library with a stack of pamphlets and the will to stand there all day long. As people would walk nearby, he'd hold out a pamphlet and gently plead, "Help stop violence," over, and over, and over again. Facebook pages would pop up as a tribute to the Help Stop Violence Guy. It was a small campus, so everybody knew who this person was, but the attention he got wasn't always kind. The thing is, the violence he was referring to was the violence that occurs on factory farms in this country, and his pamphlets were all about the terrors of meat, egg, and dairy production. His mission was to get kids to go vegan, and this was back in 2008 or so, before plant-based eating went mainstream, before you could get Impossible Burgers at Burger King, before non-dairy ice cream was delicious, which it is now.

And I was like those other kids, rolling my eyes at the Help Stop Violence Guy, thinking if we're not supposed to eat meats, why does it taste so good? But one day, I don't know why, I took the pamphlet from Sir Help Stop Violence, and suddenly my food started to look very different. I couldn't shake the realization that the chicken sandwich that I'd casually eat over the course over a few minutes came from a system that created, exploited, and took a chicken's life by the hundreds of thousands. So, I haven't eaten meat since, and I've gone through bouts of swearing off eggs and dairy entirely, but I'm not perfect. The whole thing always gets me thinking. What's at the root of how humans view animals? Why are we outraged when one animal is killed, but silent when many others are? And how can these views change?

You're listening to Opinion Science, the show about our opinions, where they come from, and how they change. I'm Andy Luttrell, and this week I talked to Kristof Dhont. He's a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Kent, and he studies the factors shaping people's perceptions and thinking about animals. He recently co-edited a book, which came out earlier this year, called Why We Love and Exploit Animals: Bridging Insights From Academia and Advocacy. You'll also hear me mention a conference he was organizing, which was canceled when… Well, the whole world shut down. It was going to be a meeting of social scientists and animal activists, so that each could learn from the other.

Anyhow, in our conversation, Kristof shared some of his findings about the psychology of human-animal relations and why, psychologically, speciesism has a lot in common with racial and ethnic prejudices.

Andy Luttrell:
Yeah, so I thought one place we could start was just, so you have a book, co-edited a book that just came out. You were in the process of organizing a conference, which obviously it didn't get to happen this year. And so, that signals sort of a bubbling up of interest in these topics of humans' relations with other animals, and advocacy on the part of those animals, and so I was wondering if you could, even just sort of to start, pull back the lens a little and give an overview of where are we in the process of, or where did these interests come from? Why do you think that this now is sort of a bubbling field of work?

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. I think it's one of the biggest social justice issues that is being tackled at the moment. Not everything is solved, clearly, from these other social justice issues, but it's kind of the next front line, now. It's the next battlefield that we're going into. And people start to realize more and more that our behavior and our thinking about animals is actually not okay, and it's deeply problematic, and so we're not only kind of harming animals. It also harms ourselves. It also harms humans. And more and more people start to be aware of that, so it's now started to get easier to get people involved in this animal rights struggle, because we're harming the environment by doing it, we're harming ourselves, our health, by doing this. And that's kind of what people have now been starting to investigate, as well, in psychological research.

Andy Luttrell:
Could you give an overview of what those harms are? Maybe just to set the stage for things? So, for people who are really unaware of what kinds of harms you might be talking about.

Kristof Dhont:
Sure. Yeah, so generally speaking, we often refer to the animal food industry, like the meat industry is probably the most problematic. In fact, it's one of the biggest contributors to climate change. It's also where the largest number of animals are being killed or exploited by humans. So, that's definitely the biggest, but we exploit animals in all kinds of ways. We use them to entertain ourselves for sports, the cosmetic industry with animal tests, and then also the pharmaceutical industry and medical tests. These are all different ways how we kind of use animals just to get human benefits from it.

Andy Luttrell:
And what's interesting is these harms are not new, but it seems like the issues are gaining more traction. Do you have any sense of why it's taken this long for a light to get shined in a sort of global sense to what's going on?

Kristof Dhont:
That's a very good question and I actually don't know why it's been taking so long. It's already since the '70s, '80s, more and more scholars in philosophy have been writing about it, and really pointing out that our relations to animals is problematic. But yeah, I actually can't really tell why

it has been taking so long to really kick it off. And yeah, you do see in all kinds of different sectors of society that there's a lot more interest in it and more people start to care more.

Andy Luttrell:
So, if we look at having the work that you've done, plus looking at lots of other work in putting this book together, could you sort of give a general summary of what is at the root of the psychological issue, in terms of how humans relate to animals in ways that are at some times exploitative and other times seemingly really positive and nurturing?

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. So, I appreciate you asking me for the psychological perspective there, because we have… In our book, we also have sociologists and people from bioethics, and that's of course outside my own area of expertise. So, from the psychological perspective, we look at human behavior and human psychology there, and that was characterized by a strong sense of human superiority beliefs over animals and over nature, and that belief shapes our thinking about animals and how we use them for our own benefits. And then we start to, once we realize that we exploit them and can't deny it really, you also feel that more conflict going on. People like to think of themselves as being morally good people, and most people still agree with the fact that it's not okay to harm animals. We don't want them to suffer. That has been show in several surveys, that people are actually inherently against animal suffering.

So, you start to realize there's a paradox in your attitudes and your behavior. The behavior that people are engaged in on a daily basis, by consuming meat, or engaging in certain sports, or watching entertainment involving animals on TV and so on. So, then what do we do with that? What do we do with conflict and how do we solve that? And psychologists have come up with that cognitive dissonance theory to trying to explain that, and rather than changing own behavior and going vegan or reduce animal product consumption, we just come up with all kinds of strategies. We justify the harm we're doing to animals. We dissociate meat from animals in the way we talk about meat. Pigs become pork; cows become beef. The way we present it in the supermarket, there's actually quite an interesting study done by Jonas Kunst, where he kind of clearly shows how we dissociate meat from animals, and if you kind of make people aware of this connection between the meat and the animal origin, where the meat is coming from, people are way more reluctant to eat meat, like their willingness to consume meat is being reduced by being aware of that connection.

And so, and even when we start being aware of it and we're kind of being shown that actually are being harmed for your appetite for meat, for a daily pleasure, there's that work from Brock Bastian, and Steve Loughnan, and Nick Haslam, showing that we kind of dementalize animals and we strip them away from their capacities to suffer. So, we make ourselves believe that they can't suffer, that they can't think, that they are actually not agents, which is of course pretty absurd to think about. Because we know from biology and all kinds of animal sciences that pigs are as smart or even smarter sometimes than dogs, and then we will never do that to dogs, at least not in Western world. So, in that context, we would find that totally unacceptable.

Andy Luttrell:
Is it… So, some of this seems like awareness, right? Most of what you're saying is that you can draw people's attention to the fact that the beef that's packaged in the grocery store started as a

living animal, and you can draw people's attention to different aspects of the exploitation or whatever. But I also get a sense that some of it is, even if you draw awareness, there can still be resistance, right? So, people can still say, "I fully comprehend that this was an animal, and that's fine." And so, what's that extra step for people to argue against even those premises?

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. We know also that people use different types of justifications to just keep on doing what they're doing. They like to think that eating animals is normal, it's needed, it's necessary, so they justify that way. It's a natural thing to do. And then the main reason that it's hard to argue with, it's just simply because it's nice. So, they find it totally okay to engage in meat consumption, to eat animal products, because it's simply because it's nice. And of course, from a moral perspective, people will never use those arguments, those justifications to justify other types of violence or harmfulness. But yeah, that's how flexible our cognitive mechanism and our justification systems are.

To really get into the mindset of people and to trying to change their behavior, I think we need more deeper psychological strategies and interventions if you want to apply it on a mass scale to change that behavior.

Andy Luttrell:
You mentioned superiority and speciesism. Could you unpack what that is a little bit? Because I wondered if part of that is even if you draw attention to these realities of where food comes from and what the realities of entertainment are, part of why people might still say, "Yeah, but that's how the world is, and that's just fine." So, what is that? How would you describe speciesism in a way that-

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah, from a psychological perspective, you can define it as the differential treatment or moral evaluation, differential moral evaluation of animals merely based on their species membership. So, we assign different moral work to different types of species merely because they just belong to different species. So, you can actually compare it easily to other types of prejudice, because that's how psychologists also define prejudice in terms of race, or in terms of sex, or gender. So, the term speciesism is then usually in a more general sense used to refer to the systemic exploitation of animals. The negative component and the prejudicial component is more highlighted there.

And you see that, that comes with, I think, with two main tendencies, and one that's already been mentioned is that universal sense of human superiority, where humans are at the top of everything, so they can dominate other species as they like. But then the second part is that we also discriminate between different types of species, and I alluded to that earlier with dogs versus pigs, but that's kind of how we construct these social categories of companion animals versus farmed animals and so on. And then we see, and we believe that these farmed animals, because they are meant for food, it's an inherently human social category that we impose on them, makes them also of less moral worth. So, we don't need to care too much for them because of our needs and our desires.

Andy Luttrell:
And people vary in this, right? Not everybody holds a strongly speciesist world view and not everybody denies it, right? So, are there things we know about what makes that an alluring world view to some and not to others?

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah, so it's definitely an individual difference variables, so people differ in the way they kind of support these species through principles and human superiority beliefs, and we've been looing in our own work at ideological factors, because I'm also doing a lot of research in political psychology and general ideological motives and beliefs. And in our previous work, my collaborators, we all investigated these ideological variables to predict prejudice towards racial out groups, to predict sexism, homophobia, and so on. And then we start to think about, yeah, these are kind of these common roots, these common ideological belief system, and painting different types of prejudice as all were kind of referred to as generalized prejudice. So, if these types of species, if that's really a type of prejudice connected to other types of prejudice, that same common ideological root must be at the core of it.

And one of these variables that we start to investigate is social dominance orientation, and that's the degree to which people prefer society be constructed in a very hierarchical way, with a strong sense of inequality between social groups, as opposed to a more egalitarian structured society. And then we start to look at these correlations between social dominance orientation, and we systematically found that those who really are in favor of unequal societies and inequality between social groups are also not just more likely to score higher on ethnic prejudice scales, but also score much higher on speciesism, endorse human superiority beliefs. And then we took it one step further there, we also asked the question why ethnic prejudice is correlated with speciesism, and we thought that social dominance would be a key driver there, so when we parceled out for this common variance, this common core underpinning different types of prejudice, we clearly found that social dominance indeed explained much of the variance that was shared between different types of prejudice.

Andy Luttrell:
So, you're saying there's sort of a common root to all of these types of prejudice that seems to be due in large part, but not exclusively, but in large part to this idea of to society works in the way that it works because things should be unequal, some groups ought to be on top, some species ought to be on top, and others are subservient, right? And that's sort of a common world view that would help explain why someone would have all sorts of prejudices. Is that kind of right?

Kristof Dhont:
Yes, exactly. Yeah, what we thought, as well, and that's heavily inspired by social dominance theory by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto. They actually outlined very similar principles in their book, and they kind of in one sentence, they also refer to animals, or can't really remember how specifically, but that also triggered us, like, "Wow, this has been underexplored. No one really investigated it." So, now we kind of propose that model, which we then called the social dominance human-animal relations model, to extend the social dominance framework to human-animal relations, as well.

And what we see done by many other researchers is that they've done similar research to look at environmentalism, applying social dominance theory to why we exploit nature.

Andy Luttrell:
Hard to call that social. I guess kind of, right? But the idea is that humans are dominant over nature. Is that sort of what that means?

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. There are different explaining theories behind them, and one is indirectly related to human and to corporations, as well, and that's kind of that social justice environmentalism aspect, as well. That we exploit nature also at least partly because we want to exploit or keep our low status groups at the bottom. It's kind of linked together environmental justice with these things, as well. It's often the low status group that suffer most from the nature exploitation, and so the environmental exploitation, as well. So, it's kind of a mix between on the one hand, feeling entitled to exploit nature, and at the same time animals, so that's one component, but also on the other hand, doing that also is… It's helping the higher status group mostly, and actually oppressed the lower status groups in society.

Andy Luttrell:
Yeah. Putting it as feeling entitled, that seems like a useful way of summarizing this, that you feel entitled to use nature, other animals, other groups as you wish, because that's fine. That's how it's supposed to be. But, so what's interesting too is that the other side of this, because my impression is all of these are correlations, right? You measure people's social dominance orientation, you measure their reactions to other groups, because you could look at the exact same finding as being the people who least believe that inequality is appropriate, the people who think that we ought to strive for equality among people, may be the same who think that we should strive to eradicate these speciesist world views, and these environmental exploitations, right? So, is there evidence of interventions that would generalize the effect? So, if I were to try to get you to believe that as a society of people there ought to be equality, that that would have spillover effects into your view about animals?

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. That's a very interesting question, and I don't know of any sort of interventional research that has been… We've been playing around with these ideas, like how can we do that, and we should kind of expect a spillover effect, but the only research I can think of now is the work we've done on intergroup contact, and in some of my previous work, that was my first main topic that I've been doing research on, was how prejudice can be reduced through intergroup contact. And in one of the studies, we found that well, the more contact that people have with other [0:19:38.8] outgroups, the lower they not only score on prejudice scales over time, and that's kind of a quite reliable, stable finding, that contact reduces prejudice, but also that social dominance orientation's going down.

So, people become more of an egalitarian mindset and they're more open to reduced prejudice towards other kinds of groups, which again links to what they called in intergroup contact research the secondary transfer effect of intergroup contact. And what we've done in longitudinal cross sectional studies is now look at, because we knew about the fact that social dominance also is tied

to environmentalism and anti-environmental behavior, exploitative behavior, we looked at the longitudinal effects of contact on social dominance, and then further on pro environmentalism. And that's how we kind of also connected those dots and show these spillover effects.

So, that's kind of the closest that I can think of that would be an answer to your question, but I think much more needs to be done in terms of effectively testing types of interventions. I'm very much interested in how interspecies contact could reduce social dominance orientation, as well, or how classroom intervention that we know that worked to reduce prejudice may also open up people's minds towards other groups, but also towards animals.

Andy Luttrell:
Yeah. Reminds me of this weird conflict of when you go to a zoo… I don't know, at least in the States, when you go to the zoo, you'd think this is an opportunity, holding constant what we know to be true about zoos sometimes, that it's a contact opportunity, right? For kids to come in contact with animals, and get excited about animals, and then it always strikes me as weird that when you go to the food court, it's all hamburgers, chicken nuggets, and these other things, and you go… again, that just stems back from that lack of connection, right? That you go, "Well, if we're not seeing this as animals, then the possibility of that transfer from the contact experience might be reduced."

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. Exactly. So, it's a lot more complicated than for instance group contact theory. If you read about it, it can come across as very simplistic, even though the core tenets of it seem to be reliable and true, and there's so much more going on, and that's the same with human-animal relations. We have this kind of classification systems in our head from the day we are socialized into society that some animals are meant to be eaten and others are meant to be left alone and be kind of appreciated and taken care of. And I think with food animals or farmed animals, we will not help them by bringing people to a zoo. What could help, and that should be tested, but there's a lot of stories out there that say, "Well, when I visited a farm sanctuary and was able to connect to these animals and play around with a pig, or just really start to see what they are and how they behave in their natural environment," it really made the connection. It really opened the eyes that these are sensitive beings, and are smart, and of course can suffer, as well.

That's where we can actually make some change. If you kind of change people's beliefs, but also make them empathize with these farm animals, that could help, and that could be kind of a meaningful interspecies contact situation.

Andy Luttrell:
I was thinking too about, to go back to that earlier question about why now, why is there more interest in animal welfare and sorts of things, and I wonder if some of it stems from kind of what we were saying with the possibility of those spillover effects, where we've seen over the last 50, 60 years a lot of progress and interest in sort of human civil rights, and human equality-related messages, that once you sort of activate those thoughts that sort of push that social dominance orientation toward the lower end, it maybe opens people up. So, I wonder, maybe there's a more proximal step, meaning like human-related equality maybe is more proximally associated with a social dominance orientation to people. But then once that's satisfied, "satisfied," it sort of makes

people go, “Oh. Well, there are these other groups or ideas that are in low status positions and for maybe no good reason.” And so, maybe that explains some of that, too.

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. I would tend to agree with that. It also reminds me about these circles of compassion, of moral circles that are expanding according to some scholars. Once you kind of open up to all the other groups and you kind of recognize there’s kind of this egalitarian ideas behind it, and then you start thinking outside those circles, as well, and what’s not included, it’s animals would be the next one that would be included.

Andy Luttrell:
Have you found any pushback in linking speciesism to social dominance? So, I told you that I teach this now in my prejudice class as sort of a… When we talk about social dominance orientation and how it’s related to prejudices toward other kinds of groups, I sort of just throw out the research that you’ve done to say, “And it seems to extend to these other things.” And I always expect a little bit more pushback from students, and I’ve gotten a little bit of it, to say like, “Well, come on. That’s a little far-fetched. This is a class on prejudice. Prejudice is about people. It’s not about animals.” So, I just wondered if you faced any pushback in trying to sort of gain traction on this connection.

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. We had some pushback in the early days when we started to publish on this stuff. Social psychologists in general were not really open to it. Can’t really generalize to every social psychologist, because we got a lot of support from others, as well. But it was a difficult topic to publish first, because they kind of didn’t see what happened, so they are the important, the urgency of this. But then once they kind of… Once we got those first papers out and we started to connect with other people, there was a lot more open-mindedness to it.

In terms of my own students that I’m teaching, I found them very open to these ideas. They haven’t thought about it. I’m often surprised how few, either student, universities, haven’t thought about these topics in this way. Typically, the majority of the students here at Kent are on board with being anti-sexist, being anti-racist, and all the other social justice issues, and then you try and the speciesism angle there, and then they are actually fascinated, but they’re not always convinced immediately. But at least you made them think about these topics in similar ways, and then you can have a meaningful class discussion, and I think… Yeah. They’re definitely open to it.

So, I don’t experience too much pushback anymore at the moment. I do think there’s a lot more pushback in society in general, and the more vegetarianism, the more veganism, and anti-speciesism is on the rise, the harder the pushback becomes from certain corners. Especially from the meat industry, that they have of course a vested interest not to make the vegan industry as big as it’s becoming now. The alternative meat industry, as well, like the clean meat industry is coming up. And of course, they are scared at some point that vegan industry might take over a substantial portion of the market.

And then there’s pushback from some corner at the political right side of the spectrum, as well, where they kind of try to protect their traditions that involves meat consumption or involving

animal exploitation and so on. So, that's where you see political commentators, or journalists, or in opinion pieces where they kind of push back against the rise of veganism.

Andy Luttrell:
The way you framed it, especially with your students, by sort of anchoring it in these social justice motives that already seem pretty acceptable, right? Like great, sexism we should get rid of, racism is bad, and then it becomes maybe more palatable to introduce this other thing. But I also have seen provocative animal activists comparing factory farming to slavery, and that also ruffles feathers too, for people to say, "You can't compare this to racism. You can't compare it to these human rights-related things." And so, yeah, I wonder what the balance there is, where sometimes… It sure seems like sometimes that's the road to get people on board, and then other times it's the road to alienate an audience.

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. I think that it's the way you frame your message there and what you use as imagery and how you want to come across and what your audience is, really. If you're talking to a more left wing audience, can have this meaningful debate and this discussion in the classroom, and you don't even need the imagery and you avoid the very sensitive historical events that might upset people, that are just psychologically very difficult to deal with, to be exposed to. And even there, I would never use it, just like that. I think we need to be very careful with these historical events, these atrocious things that happened in the past, so slavery, the Holocaust, this imagery that has been used in animal rights campaigns, I don't think there's solid evidence of what the impact of that was, whether it helped or harmed, but there was a definitely a sizable portion of the population, the ethnic or religious minorities who felt super offended by it, and then also other people feel that it's unacceptable to use other causes to help animal rights' cause.

So, if people start questioning your motives, or start thinking you have actually bad intentions for some people, I think that's where the conversations get stuck, really. So, it's not only, can not only be seen as disrespectful to these certain targeted groups, but also just not effective. If you belong to one of the minority groups, or you have family that have been involved in slavery, you have these deep psychological traumas that are still unresolved as of today, as we've seen with the Black Lives Matter movement, then you feel offended. You might feel dehumanized by comparing images from factory farms to images from slavery. And that only creates more negativity, and then the focus of the debate is on different issues than we actually wanted to. So, I don't think it's particularly helpful there.

Andy Luttrell:
I'm curious. I mean, you've said that you've done work, and is this alludes to, are interested in racism, other ethnic prejudices, so what I'm curious is is that where this interest started? Did you come into the world of psychology thinking, "I'm interested in prejudices. And hey, weird, animals are one of those groups that people aren't paying attention to." Or did it come the other way around, where you sort of always had the interest in animal advocacy and then sort of it blossomed into a more general intergroup perspective?

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. It's a bit of both, actually. So, from my… I've always been interested in animals and veganism from like 20 years ago now, and then never really used that in my research. That was not the focus of my PhD. So, I was also interested in racism and anti-racism and prejudice reduction and prevention. So, that was the main body of my PhD, and then later on, my postdoc that I did was focused on intergroup contact. And then, once I became a lecturer, and also already here in my postdoc years, we started to kind of open up the scope. I had more freedom to investigate whatever I wanted, and then, so like let's start looking into that, and then with my collaborator, Gordon Hodson, it was becoming so obvious for us, like we should study this now. We've been both working independently on these very similar topics, on intergroup contact and prejudice, but actually we're also interested in animals. And he at that time had a brilliant PhD student, Kimberly Costello, working on her PhD, where they made the connection between dehumanization of human outgroups and how that actually also communicates what we believe about human-animal relations and the lower status of animals, and that this is actually at the fundamental roots of why we dehumanize other outgroups.

So, our earliest conversations were still about intergroup contact and ideological beliefs, but that moved quickly onto let's do a bit more new research. Everyone was already doing intergroup contact research. We said like, "Yeah, this is… We should kind of expand this group and now look into speciesism, as well."

Andy Luttrell:
Just to wrap up, I was thinking that it would be useful to look at practical implications of some of the stuff that you've done, or the work that you've been reading for compilation purposes. Because what I thought was really neat about the conference that, again, would have been a few weeks ago I think, right?

Kristof Dhont:
Yes, yes. Yeah. I'm still not over it that we had to kind of postpone. Yeah, we don't know what's going… Really don't know what's going to happen next year. We hope we can just get on with it in some format. But yeah, so-

Andy Luttrell:
But one of the things I thought was so interesting was that it was sort of always meant to be a meeting of academics and communicators, right? That was my impression, was that it was sort of like if you're in the world of research, this is the chance to share and learn, and if you're in the world of activism and advocacy, this is a chance to shape your approach. And so, I wonder, what might we have hoped would come out of this meeting, right? What might activists or communicators who are interested in animals, or even in other topics potentially, what might they glean from the research that's been done for the last 10 years or so?

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah, so one of the main reasons, and also the book, we had the subtitle Bridging Insight From Academia and Advocacy. We want to bring these two worlds together, who often not talk to each other, with academics being often in their ivory towers, not knowing what's actually going on in the streets or in the real world. And then advocates not having access to the academic papers to

shape their thinking about strategies. At the same time, we see a big move in these advocacy organizations that they start to get more and more interested in doing research themselves, and they do more research. You have like Animal Charity Evaluators now. You have an organization like Faunalytics summarizing all kinds of academic research on their webpage, doing research themselves, so building that bridge between these two worlds can inform each other. It's not one-way communication, like academics can get tons of ideas from advocates that they have from years of experience, and then the next step would be once we kind of start this connection, working together more intensively and communicating with each other, we can also start seeing what is actually effective in animal advocacy. And that was of course more to your question. The problem there is there's not that much out there that we can actually be very confident about this works and this doesn't work. Brings me back to the point that we really need this kind of large scale intervention studies now, to test the efficacy of those.

Some studies, like you see growing body of studies on messaging strategies, typically short-term effects, kind of conceived in a typical social psychological way, like small experiments that can tease out small effects, which is informative, but it's not what actually I think you need for large-scale interventions in the world. But also, all the research about more the negative aspects of this is informative. We know that people are very good at the idea of preservation resistance and moral reproach, that we kind of… The moment that it communicates, it has more arguments, you start to be very careful in what you try to block your attitudes off from these messaging strategies, because you don't want to be convinced by someone who's telling you what to do and what not to do, right? Basic human psychology again.

The other one that I'll definitely also want to highlight, it's that knowing that there's intersectional connections there between different types of prejudices, speciesism is not excluded from them. It's very interesting, because we know that some of these campaigns of animal rights groups have been using objectifying sexualizing images of women, which is not only problematic, but also may harm the impact they have, because if you dehumanize, animalize women, you might not really communicate anything about the welfare of animals, but just put women at that lower animal status, societally speaking, and just sustain negative attitudes and prejudice towards both animals and women.

Andy Luttrell:
That is less of a hopeful note to wrap up on. So, we haven't solved the problem. I think that's the...

Kristof Dhont:
No. Speaking of a hopeful note, then. Yeah. I don't know-

Andy Luttrell:
Yeah, it just signals that there's more to be done, right? That-

Kristof Dhont:
Yes. Yes. Definitely.

Andy Luttrell:
At the very least, we have new evidence, right? Before, people were flying by the seat of their pants, kind of coming up with, "We4ll, I don't know." That's what happens with any real advocacy campaign that doesn't take the time to think about what actually could work and why messages might work better in some circumstances than the other. I mean, that from my perspective, as a persuasion researcher, I definitely call for more research before we just sort of invent campaigns out of nothing.

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. It seems like there's more promise too. If you don't really go to the food aspect of it, where you kind of want to promote vegan products. It seems like if you can actually present and make people eat nice, tasty, vegan products, they will change their behavior and attitudes might change because of that. So, you follow the other approach, and that's kind of a very interesting angle, as well. Rather than always trying to change people's attitudes, trying to convince them to think the right ideas about these topics before they change, and then assume that they will change behavior.

The other way around might actually be slightly easier, if you can actually change people's habits in organizational settings, in schools, they can be prompted to go for a healthier vegetarian or vegan option or frame it in environmentally-friendly ways. That might actually kind of install new behavioral habits and then it might start opening up to other issues that comes from this behavior change.

Andy Luttrell:
And changing norms, too, I always think is fairly powerful.

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah, so that would kind of also communicate a norm, if you think this is kind of what you want to promote, and social norms is definitely a big influencer there.

Andy Luttrell:
Okay. Well, I feel better. I'll take it.

Kristof Dhont:
That's the optimistic, more positive approach.

Andy Luttrell:
Well, Kristof, thanks so much for talking about the work that you've done, and we'll keep an eye out for what's next.

Kristof Dhont:
Yeah. Thank you very much for inviting me. I really enjoyed it. Yeah. Looking forward to listening to more of these podcasts.

Andy Luttrell:
That'll do it for this episode of Opinion Science. Thank you to Kristof Dhont for coming on the show. To learn more about his work, check out the show notes for a link to his lab's website and

a link to his new book, Why We Love and Exploit Animals. And hey, I'd be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to promote a project from a few years ago. In grad school, after visiting collaborators in Spain a couple times, I wrote and released my own vegan cookbook called Vegan Spanish Cooking. It's vegan versions of classic Spanish foods, and you can get it on Amazon. I'll put a link in the show notes. Every summer, I make the Pisto and Gazpacho from that book constantly, so that's my recommendation.

As always, head on over to OpinionSciencePodcast.com to learn more about the show and to get a transcript of this week's episode. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter @OpinionSciPod, and you can also rate and review the show at Apple Podcasts to encourage people to check it out. Okay, that's all for now. See you next week for more Opinion Science. Bye-bye.