



CEPDISC highlights 2022

Centre for the Experimental-Philosophical Study of Discrimination,

Aarhus University (2020—2026)

2022 was a year with exciting research and results. New studies involving several new field and survey experiments came to life and workshops and seminars with guests and collaborators fostered new ideas and collaborations.

CEPDISC'22 Conference on Discrimination

In October, the center held its second international conference on discrimination which was also its official opening conference. The conference gathered 70 researchers and PhD students, from a wide range of different fields, e.g., psychological anthropology, (anti)discrimination law, political and social psychology, philosophy of discrimination, ethics of immigration, medical ethics, and practical philosophy from all over the world.



CEPDISC'22 Conference on Discrimination.

Opening Keynote By Paul Sniderman.

Photo: CEPDISC

Objectification as a form of discrimination against women candidates

In an article published in the *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, Claire Gothreau and co-authors Amanda Milena Alvarez and Amanda Friesen argue that sexual objectification is a form of dehumanization that could potentially impact perceptions of women in politics. Gothreau et al. posit that dehumanization decreases perceptions of women's warmth and morality, as well as decreases perceptions of competence and agentic qualities. Via these mechanisms, we would expect that exposure to objectifying portrayals of women would decrease voters' overall positive evaluations and likelihood of electoral support. The authors conduct a survey experiment and find no evidence that exposure to objectifying portrayals of women has an impact on support for women politicians. These results suggest that objectification, particularly when women in politics are not the direct target of the objectification, may not impact overall support for women in politics.

A new theory on "Wrongful Discrimination Without Equal, Basic Moral Status"

Many theorists think that discrimination is wrongful because it involves treating those subjected to discrimination as if they have a lower moral status than others when in fact all people are moral equals. However, there are strong reasons, expounded by Peter Singer, to doubt that all people are indeed moral equals (viz., anencephalics). While it may turn out that, ultimately, these reasons can be shown to be unsound, we cannot rule out the possibility that we are not all moral equals. If we are not, discrimination cannot be wrong because it involves failure to treat people as moral equals. With this in mind, in his paper in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen proposes two anti-inegalitarian accounts of the wrongness of discrimination – "anti-inegalitarian" rather than "egalitarian" because, strictly speaking, they do not posit equality of status, and "anti-inegalitarian" rather than "inegalitarian" because they reject all or almost all inequalities in status. These two accounts have many of the attractions of the moral equality account. Being immune to Singerian doubts about moral equality is also a strength of the accounts because it means that they are not hostage to the outcome of the intricate debate over moral equality.

Discrimination in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

In a study devoted to understanding discrimination in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, published in *Nature* Michael Bang Petersen and his co-authors Alexander Bor & Frederik Jørgensen find evidence of substantial support for discrimination based on whether or not a person was vaccinated against COVID-19. Specifically, vaccinated people favored excluding unvaccinated people from family relationships, stereotyped them, had antipathy towards them and were supportive of removing fundamental political rights. Unvaccinated individuals only rarely displayed discriminatory attitudes towards vaccinated individuals. Discriminatory attitudes were particularly strong in countries with strong cooperative norms and with low deaths from COVID-19, suggesting that they reflect 'the dark side' of a strong COVID-19 response. One implication of these findings is that the decision-makers need to engage in a balancing act and need to avoid sowing social tensions as they mobilize people during a crisis. The study was based on data collected in 21 countries from all parts of the world.

Another study by Julian Schüssler and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov and coauthors Søren Østergaard and Peter Dinesen, published in *Social Science and Medicine*, also analyzed discrimination based on whether or not a person is vaccinated against COVID-19. Data from Denmark showed strong support for harsher treatment of self-chosen unvaccinated compared to vaccinated citizens on issues like test fees and wage compensation during illness, and mild support of more consequential policies like getting lower prioritization at hospitals. Support for unequal treatment was also present during a period of low infection rates, which suggest that willingness to discriminate does not hinge on the presence of acute problems.

Outreach

In the podcast series by Weekendavisen "24 questions to the Professor" Thomsen, L. is interviewed about her research into infants and young children and how they have advanced understanding of dominance and social hierarchies ("Baby med styresystem", 05.09.22).

Politiken: "What is Tinder's much-maligned and mysterious recipe?" (13.09.22, Midtgaard)

Politiken: "Noah Redington: A rare defense of the Unity List's hypocrites. And I mean it!" (20.02.22, Lippert-Rasmussen).

Kristeligt Dagblad: "Why we go with the flow when the election campaign gets too complicated?" (27.10.22, Laustsen)

Daily Mail Australia "Covid jab resisters are seen as 'incompetent, untrustworthy' and not marriage material" - study reveals shocking snobbery among the vaccinated" (08.12.22., Petersen)

About CEPDISC

Centre for the Experimental-Philosophical Study of Discrimination (CEPDISC) explores the nature of discrimination from the perspective of experimental philosophy.

CEPDISC initiated its activities at Aarhus University on 1. August 2020. Presently, CEPDISC consists of 21 researchers, of which 3 are PhD students, with backgrounds in social and political psychology, on the one hand, and philosophy and political theory, on the other hand.

The Centre asks three main research questions in relation to discrimination:

- 1) What is discrimination?
- 2) What are the main grounds for objecting to discrimination and how do these grounds relate?
- 3) What can and should be done to counteract discrimination?

CEPDISC's primary objective is to address these questions from an experimental-philosophical perspective.

CEPDISC's vision is to demonstrate how an experimental-philosophical approach can shed light on some of the important issues of relevance to research and society in relation to discrimination.