

Discussion 1 Topic: Codes of Ethics and Professional Conduct

Initial Post

by [Noora Alboinin](#) - Saturday, 24 May 2025, 12:01 PM

Number of replies: 0

In this ACM case study, a team of software engineers developed a machine learning algorithm used in a recruitment platform. However, it was later discovered that the algorithm systematically discriminated against female applicants by favouring male candidates with similar qualifications. This case raises important questions regarding the application of ethical principles in computing.

The ACM Code of Ethics (ACM, 2018) outlines responsibilities such as “avoiding harm,” “ensuring fairness and non-discrimination,” and “respecting privacy.” In this case, the engineers failed to uphold these principles by deploying an algorithm with discriminatory bias—leading to real-world harm through systemic exclusion. The failure to test for or address bias illustrates negligence in professional responsibility.

Comparatively, the British Computer Society (BCS, 2021) Code of Conduct emphasises public interest, professional competence, and integrity. Clause 1(e) specifically highlights the duty to “promote equal access to the benefits of IT and seek to eliminate discrimination.”

Both codes underscore the importance of ethical reflection in system design.

Legally, such biases could violate anti-discrimination laws like the UK Equality Act 2010, particularly if deployed in the British labour market. The ethical lapse also risks reputational damage and loss of public trust, reflecting poorly on the professionalism of those involved.

This case underlines the critical need for ethical foresight, rigorous testing, and interdisciplinary collaboration when designing systems with social impact. As computing professionals, aligning with both ACM and BCS codes not only safeguards users but enhances our collective credibility and trustworthiness in society.

References

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- Fjeld, J. et al. (2020) *Principled artificial intelligence: Mapping consensus in ethical and rights-based approaches to principles for AI*. Berkman Klein Center Research Publication. Available at: <https://cyber.harvard.edu/publication/2020/principled-ai> (Accessed: 24 May 2025).

Summary Post

by [Noora Alboinin](#) - Sunday, 15 June 2025, 6:38 AM

Number of replies: 0

This discussion has provided a rich exploration of ethical challenges in computing, drawing from ACM and BCS codes of conduct and real-world case studies that reflect the complexity of professional decision-making in our field.

My initial post addressed the discriminatory impact of a machine learning recruitment algorithm, raising concerns around fairness, bias, and responsibility. It underscored the importance of proactive ethical foresight, especially when system decisions affect access to opportunities (Fjeld et al., 2020). This need for responsibility was echoed in Zhu Zhang's insightful analysis of the *Blocker Plus* case. Zhu highlighted how algorithmic bias—often resulting from under-representative training data—can unintentionally harm marginalised groups. As noted by Peters (2022), even well-intentioned systems may perpetuate structural inequalities without rigorous validation and inclusive design. Zhu's case also raised concerns about misuse of feedback loops and overblocking, an ethical failure that undermines information equity.

Similarly, Munro Ross brought attention to *accessibility in software design*, where leadership's decision to release a product despite known accessibility issues reflected a disregard for inclusive design principles. While some accountability measures were taken

post-release, the case shows that technical compliance is not sufficient; ethical obligations demand user-centered testing and responsiveness from the outset (Horton, no date).

Nasser Al-Naimi's post on drone surveillance raised broader questions about consent, surveillance culture, and transnational regulation. His reflections on GDPR and ACM Principle 1.6 (“Respect Privacy”) offered a valuable reminder that technology professionals must anticipate the societal impacts of data use, not just their functional success (ACM, 2018).

Across all posts, a recurring theme is the *disjunction between legal compliance and ethical responsibility*. While laws like the UK Equality Act (2010) or GDPR establish minimum standards, codes such as those by ACM and BCS extend these obligations by emphasising integrity, fairness, and the public good (BCS, 2021). Ethical reflection must therefore precede implementation, supported by interdisciplinary collaboration and continuous evaluation.

In summary, the cases discussed reveal the nuanced nature of ethical computing. As future AI and computing professionals, we must champion transparency, inclusivity, and accountability—not only to avoid harm, but to promote trust and equity in the systems we create.

References

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