

The ACL Ethics Committee (in a nutshell)

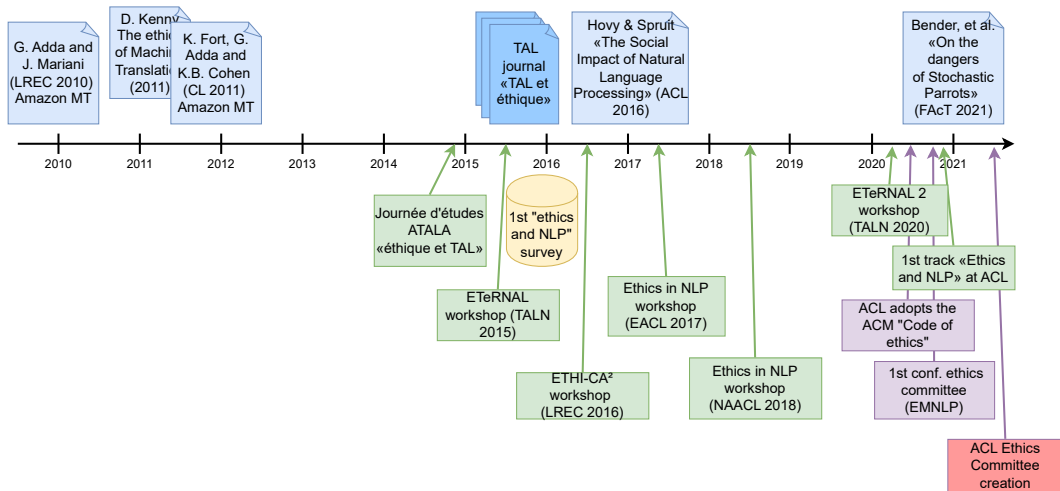
Karën Fort, Min-Yen Kan, Yulia Tsvetkov

`acl-ethics-chairs@inria.fr`

ACL 2023 – Toronto



A bit of history...



5 women, 4 men, from 8 countries
from the 3 regions represented by ACL, EACL, and NAACL



By courtesy of M. Nissim

Terms

https://www.aclweb.org/adminwiki/index.php/Formation_of_the_ACL_Ethics_Committee

Co-chairs, 5 year term (2021-2026), meetings every 2 weeks:

- ▶ Karën Fort (Europe/Africa)
- ▶ Min-Yen Kan (Asia/Oceania)
- ▶ Yulia Tsvetkov (Americas)

Members, 3 year term (2021-2024), monthly meetings:

- ▶ Luciana Benotti (Americas)
- ▶ Mark Drezde (Americas)
- ▶ Pascale Fung (Asia/Oceania)
- ▶ Dirk Hovy (Europe/Africa)
- ▶ Jin-Dong Kim (Asia/Oceania)
- ▶ Malvina Nissim (Europe/Africa)

Mandate as defined by the ACL Exec

https://www.aclweb.org/adminwiki/index.php/Formation_of_the_ACL_Ethics_Committee

"The role of this committee will be to:

- ▶ Define a set of guidelines and processes for dealing with ethical concerns within the ACL
- ▶ Coordinate with the Ethics (Co)Chairs at ACL, NAACL, EACL, AACL, EMNLP conferences to ensure consistency of process and guidelines across different events
- ▶ Provide clear guidelines to the ACL membership on how to report ethical concerns, as well as any possible implications of such reporting
- ▶ Coordinate the compilation and publication of resources to educate the broad community about the limitations and societal implications of the technologies we develop"

Our actions so far

- ▶ Survey in the community to precise our mandate
- ▶ Reviewing Guidelines
- ▶ EACL 2023 tutorial *Understanding Ethics in NLP Authoring and Reviewing*
- ▶ Collaborative reading list:
<https://github.com/acl-org/ethics-reading-list/blob/main/README.md>

Ethics Committee creation



https://www.aclweb.org/adminwiki/index.php/Formation_of_the_ACL_Ethics_Committee

Yes, We Care (more)!

Results of the 2nd Ethics and NLP Survey

Luciana Benotti, Mark Drezde, **Karën Fort**, Pascale Fung, Dirk Hovy, Min-Yen Kan, Jin-Dong Kim, Malvina Nissim, Yulia Tsvetkov

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Context and participation

- ▶ Inspired by the survey of 2016 (Fort & Couillault, LREC)
- ▶ advertised on various mailing lists (LINGUIST, Corpora and LN) in 2021
- ▶ 8 questions, with **free text fields** to express yourself
- ▶ anonymous
- ▶ **263 respondents**

A very long processing time (open questions, lack of bandwidth)

Methodology for the analysis of the free text fields

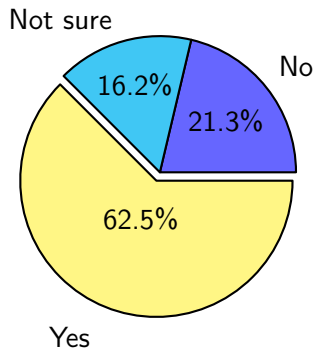
- ▶ 1 member of the committee:
 - ▶ read all the comments
 - ▶ categorized them
- ▶ 1 different member of the committee:
 - ▶ read all the comments and saw the proposed categorizes
 - ▶ categorized the comments (potentially reviewed the categories)
- ▶ if possible, adjudication meeting

Q1: Please elaborate, based on your experiences, if some specific aspects of ethical reviewing in recent conferences were useful / not useful / missing.

150 responses:

- ▶ The majority of respondents express support for the need to conduct ethics reviewing:
 - only 6 (10/150) respondents stated that ethics reviewing is not useful and should be abandoned
- ▶ 27% of responses highlight that training materials, such as tutorials and readings, should be developed for NLP authors
- ▶ 19% argue for the need to better publicize ethical guidelines for authors, reviewers, and area chairs
- ▶ 21% specifically discuss ethics checklist:
 - majority of respondents (22/32) argue against the mandatory checklists

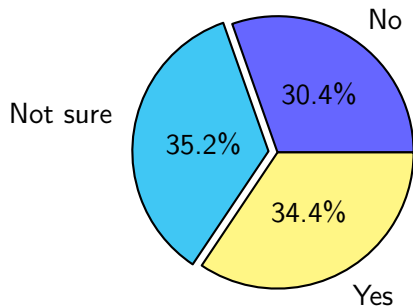
Q2: Do you think it should be possible for a paper to be rejected solely on ethical grounds, through the process of ethical review? (253 responses)



Q2: 160 persons left comments

- ▶ 21 "No" or "Not sure" were in fact conditional "Yes"
- ▶ Mentioned conditions:
 - ▶ clear decision-making process involving several peers, explicit rules and interactions with the authors (32)
 - ▶ should be a rare case, reserved for extreme cases (22)
- ▶ Examples of cases which could justify rejection:
 - ▶ unethical datasets (18) or application (14)
 - ▶ research led in an unethical way / violating IRB (13)
- ▶ Main reason to refuse is that it'd be **too subjective** (21)
- ▶ But 17 explicitly mention that there is **no use in having decided to apply a code of conduct if there are no sanctions**

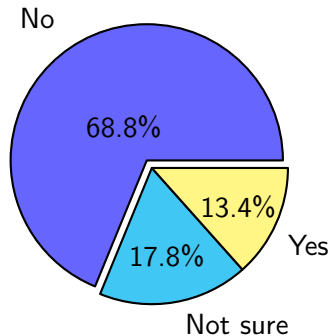
Q3: Are there applications of NLP that should not be the topic of research?
(253 responses)



Q3: 137 persons left comments

- ▶ importance of keeping the research open (23)
- ▶ possible dual use of the application (19)
- ▶ But applications with a negative impact on society or a minority should be banned (23)
 - ▶ predictive applications, "measuring" IQ from texts (25)
- ▶ 10 would be in favor of not allowing surveillance applications

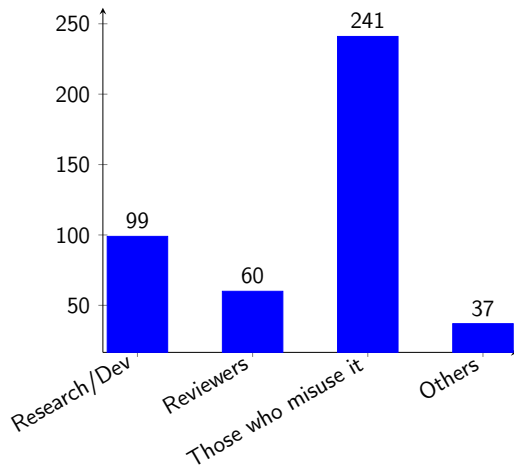
Q4: Do you think the stakeholders are aware of the limits or possible unintended harms of the tools we create? (253 responses)



Q4: 130 persons left comments

- ▶ Stating explicit limitations, intended uses and dual-use harms in publications (36)
- ▶ Public Outreach (35)
- ▶ Public Examples (19)
- ▶ Clearer Use of Language (18)
- ▶ Formal Course Education (11)
- ▶ Workflows for use and legal standards and penalties (11)
- ▶ Publications (10)

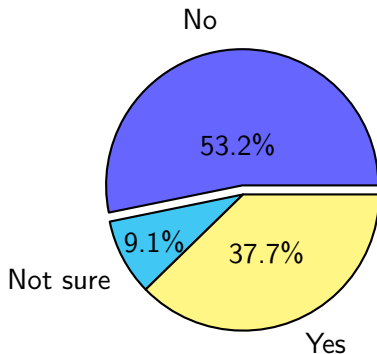
Q5: Who do you consider to be accountable when an NLP technology is misused and/or causes harm?



Q6: What do you think are the most urgent tasks for the global *CL ethics committee? (132 responses)

- ▶ policies (67)
- ▶ training material (38)
- ▶ outreach (28)
- ▶ LLM (18)
- ▶ language resources (7)

Q7: Have you participated in any class or training concerning (in any role) ethical research practices or ethics in NLP?



Q8: ideas on how to best involve the whole community

- ▶ tutorials, teaching resources, surveys, dedicated workshops/conferences (34)
- ▶ increase participation in ethics reviewing, provide training for reviewers (9)
- ▶ increase diversity and interdisciplinary engagement in ethics-related policies (9)
- ▶ increase transparency in ethics related processes (6)
- ▶ dedicated communication forum (4)
- ▶ mandatory ethics training/ ethics discussion in submissions (4)

Q9: free comments (55)

- ▶ criticism:

- ▶ fear of censorship:

- Ethics should be used as a tool to make people think, not to exclude/ shame or patronise*

- ▶ cultural relativism

- There isn't the "ethics" - different moral-philosophical positions lead to very different things that are permissible or not*

- ▶ suggestions:

- ▶ training

- I think that a yearly mandatory online 30-45 mins course is the way to go. It will be a reminder of the principles we should all have in our mind when developing AI tech.*

- ▶ material suggested for training

- ▶ positive feedback (the majority)

Conclusion: Taking the community's input into account

- ▶ Ethics review process (policies):
 - ▶ documentation provided (Dirk's presentation)
- ▶ Training:
 - ▶ EACL 2023 tutorial (Yulia's presentation)
 - ▶ Ethics reading list (Min's presentation)
- ▶ 80 persons gave their email, more than half the respondents left comments → will to participate to the discussion ⇒ panel

Report (pdf)



https://github.com/acl-org/ethics-tutorial/blob/main/survey/yes_we_care_more_results_of_the_2021_ethics_and_natural_language_processing_survey.pdf

Ethics review process timeline (Dirk Hovy)

Started about 2 years ago, as part of various conferences and refined for ARR with input from SACs, PCs, ECs, and Ethics committee

- ▶ ethics reviewer instructions and pool for ARR and various conferences (2021 through 2023)
- ▶ Ethics review form on ARR (throughout 2022)
- ▶ SAC information material on flagging (NAACL 2022)

Thanks to feedback from Marine Carpuat, Kai-Wei Chang, Marie-Catherine de Marneffe, Pasquale Fung, Margot Mieskes, Chris Potts, Amanda Stent, Diyi Yang, and many others

Ethics reviewing process (Dirk Hovy)

- ▶ Reviewers, ACs, SACs flag papers with concerns (235)
- ▶ SACs filter out false positives, forward to ECs (75)
- ▶ ECs do another check, forward to reviewers (69)
- ▶ Reviewers check for violations of ACL Code of Ethics, suggest changes, recommend:
 - ▶ Accept as-is (43)
 - ▶ Recommend with changes by CR (20)
 - ▶ Reject for ethical concerns (6: 1 rejected, 1 accepted, rest didn't pass technical review)

Understanding Ethics in NLP Authoring and Reviewing

Tutorial at EACL 2023

Luciana Benotti, Karën Fort, Min-Yen Kan, Yulia Tsvetkov

ACL 2023 – Toronto



Survey results highlight the need for training materials

- Q1: Please elaborate, based on your experiences, if some specific aspects of ethical reviewing in recent conferences were useful / not useful / missing.
 - 27% of responses (41/150) highlight that **training materials, such as tutorials and readings, should be provided to NLP authors** to improve their understanding of ethical research.
- Q6: What do you think are the most urgent tasks for the global *CL ethics committee? (132 responses)
 - Policies (67), **Training materials (38)**, Outreach (28), LLM issues (18), Language resources (7)
- Q7: Have you participated in any class or training concerning (in any role) ethical research practices or ethics in NLP?
 - 252 responses
 - Yes (95), **No (134)**, **Not sure (23)**

Tutorial proposal

Understanding Ethics in NLP Authoring and Reviewing

Luciana Benotti and **Karën Fort** and **Min-Yen Kan** and **Yulia Tsvetkov**
`acl-ethics-committee@inria.fr`

EACL 2023 tutorial

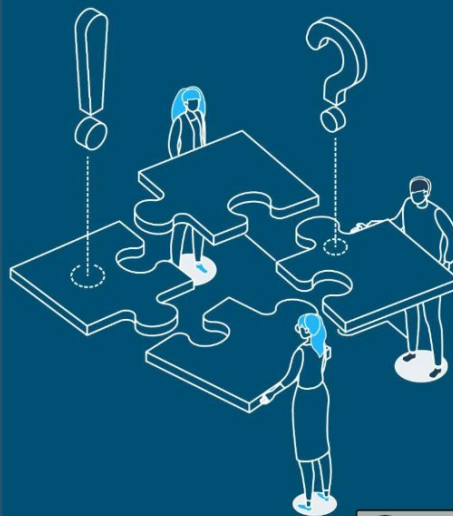
<https://github.com/acl-org/ethics-tutorial>

EACL 2023 Tutorial

Understanding Ethics in NLP Authoring and Reviewing

Luciana Benotti
Karën Fort
Min-Yen Kan
Yulia Tsvetkov

Link to these slides: <http://bit.ly/eacl23-ethics-slides>



Tutorial structure

1. Introduction, foundations for ethics, brief history
2. Case studies and examples of problematic ethical research
3. Structured interaction: discussion of hypothetical case studies, practice to identify potential problems
4. Ethical considerations sections

ethics-tutorial Public

Unwatch 6

main 1 branch 0 tags

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Code



knmnyn Merge branch 'main' of <https://github.com/acl-org/ethics-tutorial>

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| abstracts | Update README.md | 3 days ago |
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| proposal | Try out link | 3 days ago |
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README.md

Ethics Tutorial

<https://github.com/acl-org/ethics-tutorial>

