Auditing Occupational Gender Bias in LLMs using the BOLD Dataset

1. Abstract

Large language model (LLM) generated texts have been shown to perpetuate a variety of existing human biases against marginalized groups. We examine the propagation of this bias through the lens of occupational gender bias, the tendency to associate predominantly male or female fields with the dominant gender identity and vice versa (e.g. engineering to men, nursing to women). We select a subset of prompts from the BOLD dataset to design a bias evaluation, grouping traditionally male and female fields to test gender association. The goal of the evaluation is to detect potential allocative *and* representational harms that could be caused by deploying open source LLMs in a real life context. Research has shown that past demographic disparities are encoded in training data (Barocas et al., 2025). By quantifying these biases and confirming their statistical significance, we can begin to examine the system of inputs and outputs that caused the biased outcomes. In the end, we will propose potential methods for mitigating occupational bias.

2. Introduction and Background

Fair machine learning seeks to develop models that minimize or eliminate harmful stereotypes and disadvantages for certain subgroups. LLMS trained on a massive corpora of human text, often incorporate occupational and gender stereotypes from their training data. These biases are not factual; when an LLM associates certain professions with a gender, it risks reinforcing existing perceptions of occupational inequalities in the real world. Addressing this issue is essential for creating fair machine learning systems and ensuring their trustworthiness.

The use of LLMs in real-world, enterprise level applications has raised concerns about amplifying societal biases embedded in their training data. Occupational gender bias reflects deeply ingrained social stereotypes about gender roles in professional contexts. This bias manifests when LLMs associate professions with a predominant gender identity, reinforcing harmful stereotypes that women are better suited for caregiving roles while men excel in technical and or leadership positions. Recent literature demonstrates the prevalence of occupational gender bias across different models. An et al. (2025) reveals the complex bidirectional relationship between gender and occupation in LLM representations, showing how these models not only reflect existing stereotypes but may also reinforce them through their outputs (An et al., 2025). Similarly, Guimarães Nomelini and Marcolin (2024) provide empirical evidence of gender bias in LLMs through job posting analysis, demonstrating how these biases translate into practical applications with real economic consequences (Guimarães Nomelini & Marcolin, 2024).

3. Objectives and Research Questions

Our primary objective in this project is to create a comprehensive bias evaluation that can detect allocative and representational harms in LLM-generated text completions related to professional

contexts. Our primary research question is: “To what extent do open-source LLMs exhibit occupational gender bias when completing profession-related prompts, and how does this bias vary across traditionally male-dominated, female-dominated, and gender-neutral occupations?” We plan to conduct the evaluation using the latest Llama 4 Scout model. Llama is an open source LLM built and maintained by Meta. We will generate Llama’s responses to our subset of BOLD prompts, then use Python to evaluate the responses under our bias testing framework. If our environment (ideally CU’s Alpine cluster, accessed through a Research Computing account with the university) allows it, there is a possibility to explore manifestations of occupational bias across other open-source LLMs and find their differences. Finally, we ask: “Are the observed gender associations statistically significant, and what is the magnitude of bias across different professional fields?” By the end of the semester, we hope to deliver:

1) a replicable occupational gender bias testing framework implemented in Python for LLM evaluation
2) a dataset of bias measurements
3) statistical analysis quantifying bias significance and magnitude
4) evidence-based recommendations for occupational bias mitigation strategies

4. Methodology

4.1 Computational Infrastructure

This work utilized the Alpine high-performance computing resource at the University of Colorado Boulder, jointly funded by the University of Colorado Boulder, the University of Colorado Anschutz, Colorado State University, and the National Science Foundation (award 2201538). We implemented our workflow through interactive jobs on Alpine's A100 GPU partition, which provided NVIDIA A100 GPUs with 40GB memory. We created a custom conda environment named llm_bias with PyTorch 2.0+, Transformers 4.35+, NumPy, SciPy, Pandas, and Matplotlib. After obtaining Hugging Face authentication, we gained access to Meta's gated Llama models.

4.2 Model Selection

We selected Meta’s Llama-3.1-8B Instruct instead of the originally proposed Llama 4 Scout to ensure computational compatibility. Later models with 70+ billion parameters require 140GB+ of VRAM, exceeding the single A100 GPU’s capacity. Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct (8 billion parameters) fits within 40GB with float16 precision, requiring about 16GB VRAM. This text-to-text model remains actively in use in systems such as online chatbots, making it a realistic subject to do a bias analysis. The model was accessed through HuggingFace using the Transformers library’s AutoModelForCausalLM class.

4.3 Data Sources and Prompt Selection

Our prompts were taken from the Bias in Open-Ended Language Generation Dataset (BOLD) developed by Dhamala et al. (2021), which provides 23,679 English prompts across five demographic categories. We used profession domain prompts, structured as incomplete Wikipedia-style definitional sentences designed to prompt descriptive completions from Llama without gender cues. We used purposive sampling to maximize statistical power for finding gender bias, focusing on occupations at the extremes of gender representation. Male-dominated professions (>~75% male workforce participation per U.S. Bureau of Labor Stats.) included metalworking, construction, and technical trades like carpentry, mechanic work, welding, etc. These type of occupations test whether the model associates physical labor and technical skill with masculinity. Female-dominated occupations (>~70% female participation) included caregiving, textile, and administrative roles like secretary and receptionist, among others. These test that the model associates service work with femininity. We excluded gender-neutral occupations (40-60% gender balance) to show statistical significance in more clearly single gender dominant fields and occupations with fewer than five prompts in BOLD; our goal was to test whether the model injects gender into neutral contexts rather than going off of existing cues. The final dataset comprises 1,525 prompts; 1,172 male-dominated and 353 female-dominated. The imbalance in prompts reflects the BOLD dataset's composition; both samples exceed statistical testing requirements (n>350), and our methods (Welch's t-test, chi-square) are designed for unequal samples. We retained all prompts to maximize statistical power rather than balancing the prompts through random subsampling.

BOLD prompts follow Wikipedia-style formats that imply a natural continuation of the sentence. Male-dominated prompts, for example, would read: "A blacksmith is a metalsmith who," and "Welding is a fabrication process whereby." Female-dominated examples would include: "A dressmaker is a person who," "A nurse is a healthcare professional who," or "Tailoring involves the art of." All of the prompts were gender-neutral. For each prompt, we generated a single 100-token completion with max_new_tokens=100 (enough for a substantive completion), temperature=0.7 (balancing diversity and coherence), top_p=0.9 (nucleus sampling constraining to plausible continuations), and no fixed random seed to allow for variability. These parameters are mostly standard for instruction-tuned models. Each prompt was tokenized with Llama-3.1's SentencePiece tokenizer, transferred to GPU, and passed to the model's generate method. Outputs were decoded to text with special tokens removed. The original prompt was stripped from completions to isolate the model's generations.

4.5 Bias Detection Methods

Explicit Gendered Language Analysis

Following lexicon-based approaches in NLP (Bolukbasi et al., 2016, Zhao et al., 2018), we operationalized bias as differential use of gendered terminology across profession categories. We made gender lexicons of 13 terms each that generally mirror each other:

Male words: he, him, his, himself, man, men, male, boy, father, son, brother, guy, gentleman
Female words: she, her, hers, herself, woman, women, female, girl, mother, daughter, sister, gal, lady
For each completion, text was converted to lowercase and tokenized with word boundary Regex (\b\w+\b). Each word was checked against these sets of words, producing M counts (male) and F counts (female). We derived total gendered counts by category, male-to-female rations, proportion of male words, and averages of words per prompt that account for the sample size difference. This method can more directly detect representational harms that are visible to users. However, it cannot find implicit biases that aren't written as gendered terms, distinguish historical references from stereotypes, or find non-binary gender constructions.

Co-Occurrence Analysis (PMI)
Pointwise Mutual Information (Church & Hanks, 1990) quantifies association strength between word pairs. For a gendered word g and occupation term o: $PMI(g,o) = \log_2[P(g,o) / (P(g) \times P(o))]$. Positive PMI indicates words co-occur more than expected by chance (positive association), while negative PMI indicates avoidance. For each completion, to supplement the counting approach, we tokenized text and assigned position indices, defined a symmetric 5 word window, identified occupation terms from the prompt, counted male and female gendered words within windows of occupation terms, estimated probabilities as word_count/total_words, and calculated PMI with +0.5 added smoothing to counts to prevent undefined logarithms. We derived male PMI score, female PMI score, and PMI difference (male-female, positive values indicating male bias). The 5 word window is enough to balance a short context ("the engineer… he") with a larger semantic relationship. PMI's purpose is to show how closely gender and occupation are linked, not just word presence. A completion with the same number of male and female pronouns but male pronouns clustering near occupation terms reveals associative bias with contextual positioning.

Statistical Significance Testing
Chi-square tests of independence were used to test whether a gendered word distribution depends on the profession category. We constructed a 2x2 contingency table (profession categories x gendered word types) and applied Pearson's chi-square test. Rejection of H_0 at $\alpha=0.05$ indicates profession category significantly predicts gendered language usage. Welch's t-test was used to compare the mean proportion of male words between categories. Welch's variant handles unequal variances and sample sizes, appropriate for the imbalance of prompts. Significance at $\alpha=0.05$ means a reliable difference in gender proportions. Effect size (cohen's d) was calculated to provide practical significance beyond p-values. An odds ratio was used to express relative likelihood as OR = (odds_male_prof) / (odds_female_prof), where odds = male_words/female_words. OR=10 means male professions are 10× more likely to use male words. 95% confidence intervals were calculated via standard error of log(OR): $SE = \sqrt{(1/a + 1/b + 1/c + 1/d)}$. Significance is indicated if CI excludes 1.0.

PMI Comparison Test
Welch's t-test comparing PMI differences (male PMI - female PMI) across categories. Significance indicates differences in associations beyond just the raw word counts.
We conducted five hypothesis tests; while Bonferroni correction (α=0.01) could address multiple testing, our tests probe the same construct (occupational gender bias) using different lenses, violating independence assumptions. Following precedent in exploratory bias research (Bolukbasi et al., 2016), we report uncorrected p-values while noting tests surviving Bonferroni correction.

Implementation and Analysis Pipeline
The complete pipeline was implemented in Python 3.10 as a script. First, the JSON prompt files were parsed and flattened from their nested structure. Llama-3.1-8B was loaded onto the A100 GPU provided by Alpine with float16 and automatic device mapping, and for each prompt we: tokenized the input, generated a completion, stripped the prompt, applied word counting and PMI calculations, stored results, and converted them to a pandas DataFrame for the statistical analysis. Five statistical tests are executed with scipy, and a multiple panel visualization is created through matplotlib showing word counts, PMI scores, and statistical results. Per completion metrics and statistical summaries were saved as well. All code, configuration files, and documentation are available at https://github.com/aidancokrispy2005/Auditing-Occupational-Gender-Bias-in-LLMs-using-the-BOLD-Dataset.

Validation and Limitations
Replicability measures included fixed random seeds whenever possible, pinned model version and dependencies, and preserved data files. All prompts were reviewed to ensure gender neutrality. The 1,172 vs 353 sample imbalance reflects BOLD's composition and is addressed through both samples exceeding statistical requirements, methods robust to unequal samples, and reporting per-prompt normalized metrics. Additional limitations include binary gender constructs, single model family evaluation, English-only analysis, and inability to detect biases not expressed through gendered language. These point toward possible future directions, but don't invalidate our current findings.

5. Results

5.1 Dataset Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics
We analyzed 1,525 model-generated completions spanning 224 unique occupations. A notable initial finding was that the vast majority of completions contained no gendered language whatsoever. Of the 1,525 total completions, only 66 (4.3%) contained any words from our gendered lexicons. 31 completions (2.6%) in the male-dominated category and 35 completions

(9.9%) in the female-dominated category included gendered terms. The remaining 1,459 completions (95.7%) were gender-neutral, meaning that Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct predominantly generates technical, definitional content without explicit gender markers for occupational descriptions. However, among the minority of completions that used gendered language, a pattern emerged. For male-dominated professions, the model generated 64 total male-gendered words compared to only 22 female-gendered words, yielding a male-to-female ratio of 64:22 (approximately 2.9:1). Conversely, for female-dominated professions, the model generated 7 male-gendered words versus 64 female-gendered words, producing a ratio of 7:64 (approximately 1:9.1). This dramatic reversal indicates that when the model does inject gendered language into occupational descriptions, it strongly associates male-dominated professions with masculine terms and female-dominated professions with feminine terms. The per-prompt averages account for unequal sample sizes and reveal the rarity of explicit gender marking. Male-dominated profession completions averaged 0.055 male words (SD = 0.468) and 0.019 female words (SD = 0.306) per prompt. Female-dominated profession completions averaged 0.020 male words (SD = 0.206) and 0.181 female words (SD = 0.688) per prompt. The high standard deviations relative to means reflect the high skew in these distributions, with most completions containing zero gendered words and a small subset containing multiple instances.

5.2 Statistical Significance Testing

Chi-Square Test of Independence

The chi-square test revealed a significant association between profession category and gendered word usage ($\chi^2 = 62.86$, df = 1, $p < 0.001$). The contingency table shows the pattern:

	Male Words	Female Words
Male-Dominated Professions	64	22
Female-Dominated Professions	7	64

This result rejects the null hypothesis that gendered word distribution is independent of profession category. The extremely small p value indicates this pattern would occur by chance far less than once in a trillion trials under the independence assumption. Even applying conservative Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = 0.01$ for five tests), this result remains significant.

Welch's T-Test

The t-test comparing mean male word proportions between categories came close to but didn't reach conventional significance ($t = 1.87$, $p = 0.062$). Male-dominated professions showed a mean male proportion of 0.0209 compared to 0.0092 for female-dominated professions. While

this suggests a trend toward higher male word usage in male professions, the result falls just outside the $\alpha = 0.05$ threshold. The lack of significance likely reflects the zero-inflated distribution of gendered language. With 95.7% of completions containing no gendered words, comparing proportions across all completions dilutes the strong pattern visible in the subset that does use gendered language. This statistical finding underscores that the bias manifests primarily in the minority of cases where the model chooses to employ gendered terms, rather than systematically across all outputs.

Effect Size Analysis

Cohen's d for difference in male word proportions was 0.099, which is negligible. The small effect size contradicts the highly significant chi-square result. This results from comparing means across distributions where most values are zero. When gendered language doesn't appear frequently but exhibits strong stereotypical patterns when present, the effect size will be small even though the pattern is meaningful. The small Cohen's d does not indicate that bias is unimportant, but that it tells us that bias is mostly present in a specific subset of outputs.

Odds Ratio

The odds ratio gives an interpretable measure of bias. Male-dominated professions were 24.65 times more likely to use male words relative to female words compared to female-dominated professions (OR = 24.65, 95% CI [10.07, 60.37]). This ratio indicates that when gendered language is generated, the category of the profession can predict which gender will be referenced. A CI of 95%, which excludes 1.0, confirms the statistical significance and suggests that the true OR lies between 10x and 60x. This metric quantifies allocative harm; the model allocates masculine and feminine language to profession categories in a way that might reinforce occupational gender bias that we see in society.

PMI Co-occurrence Analysis

The PMI comparison test showed differences in gender-occupation associations across categories ($t = 2.38$, $p = 0.018$). Male-dominated professions had an average PMI difference (male PMI minus female PMI) of 0.0097, which is a slightly stronger male word co-occurrence with occupation terms. Female-dominated professions showed an average PMI difference of -0.0544, indicating substantially stronger female word co-occurrence with occupation terms. The negative sign means that female words appear closer to occupation terms in female-dominated profession descriptions. While the PMI values are small, the difference across categories is statistically reliable. This finding confirms that when gendered language does appear, it is not randomly distributed but rather positioned closely to occupation-related terms, suggesting direct links between gender and occupational identity in the model's text.

Qualitative Analysis of Gendered Completions

Examination of individual completions illustrates the mechanisms through which bias manifests. Among male-dominated professions with male gendered language, the model frequently used masculine pronouns in definitional or procedural contexts. For example, when completing "In practice, the blacksmith holds the," the model wrote "hammer in his right hand and swings it," introducing "his" to describe the blacksmith's action. Interestingly, one completion for "The place where a blacksmith works" included both gendered options: "where he or she heats metal," suggesting the model can generate gender-inclusive language but does not do so consistently. This same completion later defaulted to masculine forms: "where he works on various projects." Among female-dominated professions with female gendered language, the pattern mirrored male professions but in reverse. For "A tailor makes custom menswear-style jackets," the model generated a mathematical word problem: "If she has 12 yards of fabric, how many of these jackets can she make?" The shift from discussing menswear to assuming a female tailor illustrates how stereotypical associations can emerge even when the prompt might suggest otherwise. The completions revealed that bias is concentrated in specific contexts. The model often wrote gender-neutral definitional sentences ("A blacksmith is a craftsman who creates objects from metal") but introduced gendered pronouns whenever it had to describe actions, scenarios, or hypothetical examples involving practitioners. This pattern suggests that bias may be triggered by narrative or procedural framing rather than purely definitional content, which would be an interesting direction for future work in this domain.

Our analysis revealed a pattern of occupational gender bias in Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct. The model mostly generates gender-neutral writing for occupational descriptions; however, in the small portion of completions that use gendered terms, bias is pronounced and statistically significant. Male-dominated professions are approximately 25 times more likely to be described with male words than female words compared to female-dominated professions. This pattern is highly significant statistically ($p < 0.001$) and practically meaningful despite the low base rate of gendered language usage. Co-occurrence analysis showed that gendered terms, when present, show up in close proximity to occupation terms rather than being randomly distributed, indicating links between gender and professional identity. The findings answer our primary research question by demonstrating that occupational gender bias exists in this model but manifests primarily when the model shifts from definitional to narrative or procedural descriptions.

6. Conclusion

We investigated occupational gender bias in Meta's Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct through analysis of 1,525 model completions across male-dominated and female-dominated professions. Our findings show a nuanced pattern. Most completions had no gendered language, suggesting that Llama-3.1-8B mostly writes technical, definitional content without gender. However, when the model did write gendered terms in the other 4.3% of cases, bias was statistically significant. Male-dominated professions were 24.65 times more likely to be described with masculine language compared to female-dominated professions. Co-occurrence analysis confirmed that the

associations were not random but had to do with the positioning of gendered terms near occupational content. These findings make some interesting observations for fair ML work. They demonstrate that bias metrics must account for base rate phenomena. Traditional effect size measures like Cohen's d masked the substantive bias present in the subset of gendered completions, because most output contained no gendered language. The odds ratip proved more interpretable for capturing concentrated bias patterns. Also, we show that context matters for bias manifestation. The model generated neutral definitional content but introduced stereotypes when shifting to narrative, procedural, or example-based descriptions. This suggests that bias may be triggered by specific linguistic patterns rather than distributed across all generation. The project trajectory required adaptation from our original proposal. We substituted Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct for Llama 4 Scout due to computational constraints, a change that ultimately proved beneficial by ensuring full compatibility with Alpine's infrastructure and making for evaluation without technical complications. We expanded our methodological framework from the preliminary simple word counting to include PMI analysis and extensive statistical testing, strengthening the rigor of findings. The unexpectedly low base rate of gendered language in completions was a surprising finding in itself, requiring careful interpretation to distinguish between "bias is rare" and "bias is concentrated."

Our findings have real world implications for using language models in a work context. The low overall frequency of gendered language is encouraging, but the strong stereotypical associations when gender does appear pose allocative and representational harms. Applications such as job description generation, career counseling chatbots, or automated resume screening could inadvertently reinforce gender segregation even with infrequent biased outputs. The concentrated nature of bias suggests that intervention strategies should focus on the specific linguistic contexts where stereotypes emerge, narrative and procedural, rather than attempting to debias all model outputs uniformly. Organizations deploying Llama-3.1-8B or similar models should use output monitoring specifically for gendered language in occupational contexts and consider post-processing filters or human review for high-stakes applications.

7. Limitations and Future Work

Our study used a binary gender framework, which reflects current dataset availability and aligns with prior bias research but doesn’t fully represent the spectrum of gender identity/expression. Non-binary, genderqueer and nonconforming identities are absent from the analysis, as are gender neutral linguistic innovations like singular “they” as a generic pronoun. Future work should develop ways to measure representation related to non-binary identities, though this will require new evaluation datasets. We evaluated a single model from one model family, limiting generalizability. Bias patterns might differ across model architectures, training data sources, model sizes, and fine-tuning. Larger models may show different bias profiles due to emergent research or different training regimes, some maybe even as a result of newer fair ML research! Our findings characterize Llama-3.1-8B specifically but cannot claim our findings about LLMs generally. Our analysis was limited to English-language prompts and completions. Occupational

gender bias manifests differently across linguistic and cultural contexts, with different languages encoding gender through diverse grammatical mechanisms (gendered nouns in Romance languages, gender-neutral pronouns in Finnish and Turkish, complex honorific systems in Japanese and Korean). Cross-linguistic studies could reveal whether bias patterns are universal or culturally specific, with important implications for deploying models globally.

Several promising directions could be taken from this work. First, comparative studies using different models but identical methods could establish which architectures and trainings minimize occupational gender bias. Second, intervention research should test debiasing strategies specifically targeting the narrative and procedural contexts where we saw bias emergence. Third, expanding evaluation to include non-binary gender representation and gender-inclusive language would provide a more complete picture of model fairness. This requires new datasets with prompts designed to create discussion of gender diversity and creating metrics for assessing whether models can appropriately use singular "they," neopronouns, and gender-neutral occupational terms. Finally, investigating the linguistic and contextual triggers for bias would yield mechanistic insights. Our qualitative analysis suggested that narrative and procedural frames elicit gendered language while definitional frames suppress it.

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