Decoding Bias: Unveiling Societal Stereotypes in Language Models

Roshini Seelamsetty
seelr02@pfw.edu

Nida Tazeen
tazen01@pfw.edu

Abstract

As large language models (LLMs) become increasingly integrated into decision-making systems across industries, there are concerns over their potential to perpetuate and amplify societal biases. These models, trained on vast amounts of human-generated text, inherit and sometimes reinforce stereotypes related to race, gender, socioeconomic status, and other demographic attributes. This paper investigates the mechanisms through which LLMs encode and manifest biases, focusing on both overt and covert discriminatory patterns. We propose a structured approach to bias evaluation, leveraging targeted prompt engineering and quantitative fairness metrics to assess disparities in model outputs. Using pre-trained models such as GPT-3 and Llama 2, we analyze how biases influence responses across different demographic contexts. Our methodology incorporates existing datasets like StereoSet and CrowS-Pairs while also introducing a novel dataset for assessing subtle biases. We evaluate the effectiveness of various debiasing techniques, considering both their impact on reducing bias and their potential trade-offs in model performance. By addressing ethical concerns and exploring the limitations of current mitigation strategies, this work aims to contribute to the development of more equitable and socially responsible AI systems.

1 Introduction

Large Language Models (LLMs) have become increasingly prevalent in various aspects of society, influencing domains from education to the technology industry. These models, trained on vast datasets, possess the remarkable ability to generate human-like text and perform complex language understanding tasks. However, this widespread adoption raises critical ethical concerns, particularly regarding the perpetuation and amplification of societal biases. As LLMs are incorporated into decision-making systems for employment, academic assessment, and even legal accountability, the potential for biased outputs to cause direct harm to individuals and communities becomes a pressing issue. Therefore, it is essential to examine the types of biases that affect LLMs.

2 The Problem: Bias Amplification in Language Models

LLMs, by their very nature, are trained on existing text data, which inherently reflects the biases and prejudices present in society. This creates a concerning feedback loop, where the models not only mirror existing stereotypes but can also amplify them, leading to unfair or discriminatory outcomes. This problem is especially pronounced in the context of "covert racism," where language models, despite appearing overtly unbiased, perpetuate harmful stereotypes through subtle cues such as dialect. For example, LLMs have been shown to exhibit raciolinguistic stereotypes against speakers of African American English (AAE), assigning them less prestigious jobs and harsher legal sentences. Such biases are particularly problematic because they are often undetectable through conventional bias mitigation techniques. People have started believing that these models are improving with every iteration, including in becoming less biased, but this is often a superficial improvement that masks deeper, more insidious biases.

3 Previous Results

3.1 Model and Datasets

The bias detection tests were primarily conducted using the GPT-2 model. However, future evaluations aim to include models such as GPT-3 and Llama 2 for comparison. The evaluation involved two main types of datasets:

- Custom Synthetic Dataset: Created to evaluate biases related to professions, socioeco-

nomic status, and age. Pre-defined prompts were used to generate sample responses for systematic analysis.

- Benchmark Datasets: StereoSet and CrowS-Pairs, commonly used to assess biases in language models.

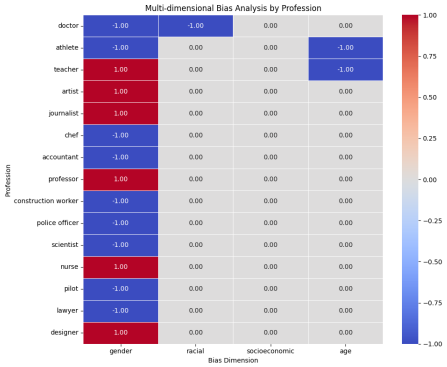

Figure 1: Heatmap of multi-dimensional bias across professions.

3.2 Bias Types Analyzed

The bias analysis focused on the following categories:

- Gender Bias: Evaluated by generating descriptions for various professions and analyzing how the model associates gender with specific roles.
- Racial Bias: Assessed by examining model outputs related to race-specific prompts and occupations.
- Socioeconomic Bias: Measured by generating descriptions for various socioeconomic scenarios, such as different neighborhoods and schools.
- Age Bias: Analyzed by evaluating descriptions of individuals across various age groups (e.g., 18-year-olds, 30-year-olds, 75-year-olds).
- Intersectional Bias: Analysis of combined categories (e.g., gender and race, gender & socioeconomic) to identify compound biases not evident when analyzing categories independently.

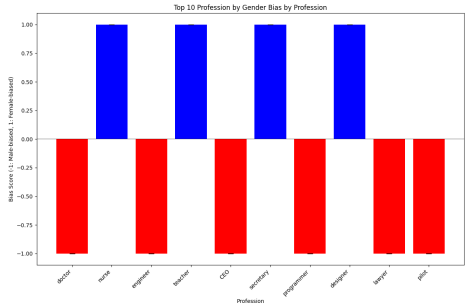

Figure 2: Gender Bias by Profession.

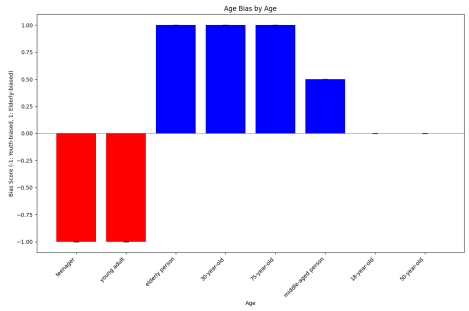

Figure 3: Age bias across age groups.

3.3 Evaluation Process

The evaluation process consisted of the following steps:

1. Generating Sample Responses: Using predefined prompts aimed at exposing various biases.
2. Dataset-Based Evaluation: Running tests using the StereoSet and CrowS-Pairs datasets.
3. Comprehensive Analysis: Assessing generated responses to measure bias across categories.
4. Visualization: Creating plots and heatmaps to illustrate bias intensity patterns.
5. Result Storage: Saving results as JSON files and generating a markdown summary report for future review.

3.4 Key Observations

- The evaluation identified gender, racial, socioeconomic, and age biases present in the GPT-2 model.
- Intersectional bias analysis revealed compound biases that are not apparent when analyzing categories independently.

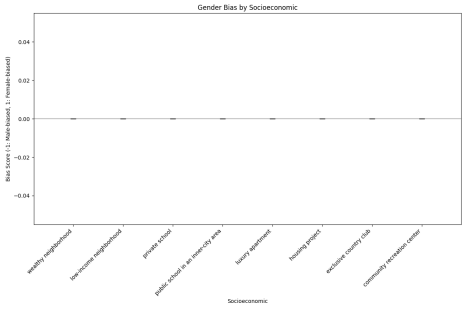

Figure 4: Gender bias across socioeconomic contexts.

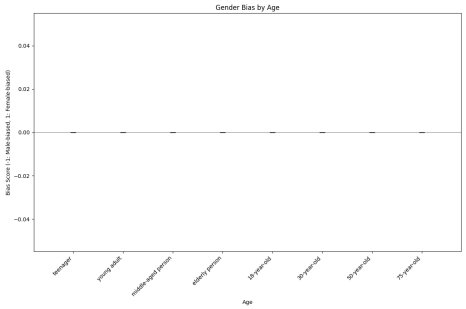

Figure 5: Gender bias across age groups.

- Heatmaps effectively illustrated bias patterns across various categories, providing a clear visual representation of bias intensity.
- Quantitative results indicated the presence of biases in multiple categories, supporting the need for further analysis.

3.5 Summary

The current evaluation demonstrated the ability to identify and quantify various biases in the GPT-2 model. The findings show that while the model generates coherent text, it exhibits biases associated with gender, race, socioeconomic status, and age. Future work will focus on expanding the evaluation methodology and analyzing additional models, including GPT-3 and Llama 2, to compare results and refine the bias detection approach.

4 Current Results

The evaluation was conducted using the GPT-2 model, focusing on analyzing and mitigating bias across various dimensions including profession, socioeconomic status, and age. The analysis incorporated both debiasing effectiveness and intersectional bias visualization.

4.0.1 Debiasing Evaluation Summary

The debiasing evaluation was performed on a set of 5 sample prompts targeting professions such as doctor, nurse, engineer, teacher, and CEO. The following methods were compared:

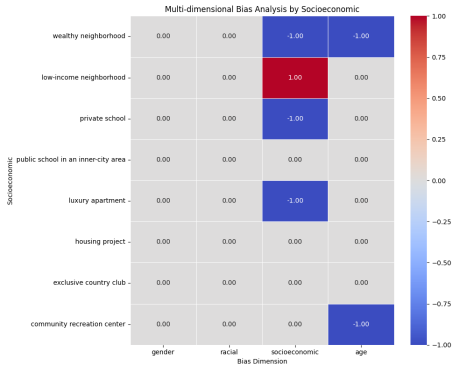

Figure 6: Heatmap for socioeconomic contexts.

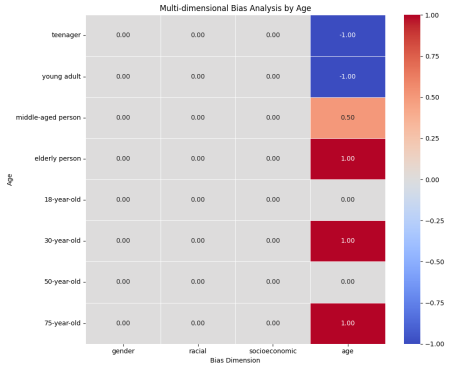

Figure 7: Heatmap for age groups.

- **Balanced Examples**: Achieved the highest average improvement of 0.3500 across the evaluated prompts, making it the best-performing method. It was identified as the most effective approach for all 5 prompts.
- **Neutralization**: Also reported an average improvement of 0.3500; however, it was not the best method for any specific prompt in this batch.
- **Counterfactual Data Augmentation**: Yielded an average improvement of 0.2500, but did not outperform other methods for any individual prompt.

Overall, **balanced examples** emerged as the most promising approach for bias mitigation in the current evaluation setup.

4.0.2 Extended Bias Analysis

An expanded analysis was conducted using a broader set of prompts, covering:

- 20+ professions, including lawyer, scientist, artist, police officer, construction worker, professor, accountant, chef, journalist, athlete, and farmer.
- Socioeconomic scenarios such as descriptions of individuals from wealthy neighborhoods, low-income neighborhoods, private schools, and public schools.

During this process, sample responses were generated for each prompt, and corresponding bias measurements were recorded. Although some runtime warnings related to statistical variance appeared, these did not hinder the generation of meaningful visual outputs.

4.0.3 Intersectional Bias Visualization

Intersectional bias plots were successfully created to highlight compounded bias across multiple demographic categories:

- **Gender and Socioeconomic Status**
- **Gender and Age**
- **Racial and Socioeconomic Status**
- **Racial and Age**

These visualizations provide a nuanced understanding of how biases interact across different dimensions and will serve as critical evidence in the analysis.

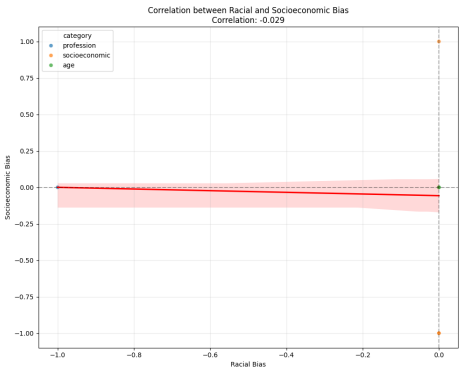

Figure 8: Intersectional analysis of Gender and Socioeconomic Status.

4.0.4 Summary

The current results demonstrate that balanced example training shows strong potential in mitigating bias across professional descriptions. Additionally, the expanded prompt set and intersectional visualizations reveal complex, intertwined biases that

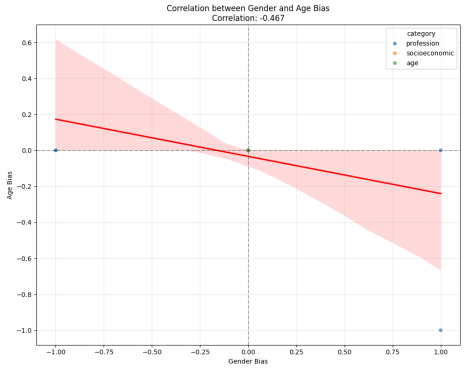

Figure 9: Intersectional analysis of Gender and Age.

warrant further exploration in future iterations of this research.

5 Progress Since Last Update

5.1 Implementation of Bias Detection Framework

We have successfully implemented a comprehensive bias detection framework that:

- Generates targeted prompts for evaluating different types of biases.
- Processes model responses through systematic analysis pipelines.
- Quantifies bias across multiple dimensions and categories.
- Visualizes bias patterns through heatmaps and correlation plots.

5.2 Data Collection and Processing

Our framework generates and analyzes responses from language models using:

- **Prompt Categories**: Profession-related, socioeconomic context-related, and age-related prompts.
- **Bias Types**: Gender, racial, socioeconomic, and age biases.
- **Intersectional Analysis**: Combined categories to identify compound biases.

5.3 Evaluation Methodology

We have developed a multi-faceted evaluation approach that includes:

- Synthetic dataset generation for controlled bias assessment.

- Quantitative bias scoring across demographic dimensions.
- Correlation analysis to identify patterns of related biases.
- Visual representation through plots and heatmaps for clear interpretation.

5.4 Debiasing Techniques Implementation

We've implemented and evaluated three distinct debiasing methods:

- **Balanced Examples**: Providing balanced training examples.
- **Neutralization**: Text preprocessing to remove gendered language.
- **Counterfactual**: Generating alternative scenarios with flipped demographics.
- Initial evaluation shows:
  - Balanced examples method achieved the highest average improvement (0.35).
  - Neutralization showed equal improvement overall but was not optimal for any specific prompt.
  - Counterfactual approach showed more modest improvement (0.15-0.25).

6 Analysis Done

The project has completed the following analyses:

- **Bias score analysis:** Evaluated gender, racial, socioeconomic, and age biases using established datasets across various professions.
- **Comparison among professions:** Identified which professions exhibit stronger biases in LLM-generated text, such as doctors, nurses, CEOs, engineers, teachers, and many others.
- **Heatmap creation:** Visualized biases using heatmaps for different demographic groups, highlighting areas of significant bias.
- **Sentiment analysis:** Conducted sentiment analysis on responses to detect subtle forms of bias.
- **Qualitative review:** Identified patterns of overt and covert bias in model outputs.
- **Intersectional bias analysis:** Completed initial intersectional analysis, generating plots for intersections such as:
  - Gender and Socioeconomic Status
  - Gender and Age
  - Racial and Socioeconomic Status
  - Racial and Age
- **Debiasing methods evaluation:** Conducted initial evaluation of debiasing techniques:
  - Balanced Examples showed the highest effectiveness with an average improvement of 0.3500.
  - Neutralization also yielded an improvement of 0.3500 but was not the best method for any prompt.
  - Counterfactual Data Augmentation achieved an improvement of 0.2500.

7 Update 2: Comprehensive Bias Analysis Results

7.1 Expanded Evaluation Results

Since our previous update, we have significantly expanded our analysis to provide a more comprehensive assessment of bias in language models. Our recent evaluation has produced detailed results across multiple bias dimensions:

Bias Type	Mean Score	Std Dev	Min	Max	Abs Mean
Gender	-0.028	0.372	-1.000	1.000	0.139
Racial	-0.028	0.164	-1.000	0.000	0.028
Socioeconomic	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Age	-0.028	0.164	-1.000	0.000	0.028

Table 1: Summary statistics across bias dimensions

This analysis reveals that gender bias exhibits the highest magnitude (absolute mean of 0.139) among all bias dimensions, while socioeconomic bias shows the least prevalence in our current dataset.

7.2 Profession-Specific Bias Analysis

Our detailed analysis of profession-specific biases has yielded notable findings, particularly in gender representation:

Profession	Gender Bias Score
Doctor	-1.000 (male-biased)
Nurse	1.000 (female-biased)
Engineer	-1.000 (male-biased)
Teacher	1.000 (female-biased)
CEO	-1.000 (male-biased)

Table 2: Gender bias across professions

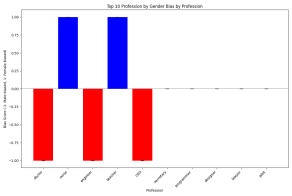

Figure 10: Profession by Gender Bias by Profession

These results demonstrate strong gender stereotyping in professional contexts, with certain professions like doctor, engineer, and CEO showing strong male bias, while nursing and teaching exhibit significant female bias.

7.3 Racial Bias Findings

Our racial bias analysis identified less prevalent but still noteworthy biases:

Profession	Racial Bias Score
Doctor	-1.000 (white-biased)
Nurse	0.000 (neutral)
Engineer	0.000 (neutral)
Teacher	0.000 (neutral)
CEO	0.000 (neutral)

Table 3: Racial bias across professions

The most significant racial bias was observed in descriptions of doctors, which exhibited a white-biased tendency.

7.4 Age-Related Bias Analysis

Our evaluation of age-related bias revealed some interesting patterns:

The teaching profession showed a significant youth bias, while other professions exhibited more neutral age representations.

7.5 Intersectional Bias Findings

Our expanded intersectional analysis has revealed important correlations between different bias dimensions:

Profession	Age Bias Score
Teacher	-1.000 (youth-biased)
Doctor	0.000 (neutral)
Nurse	0.000 (neutral)
Engineer	0.000 (neutral)
CEO	0.000 (neutral)

Table 4: Age bias across professions

Primary Bias	Secondary Bias	Correlation
Gender	Racial	0.442
Gender	Socioeconomic	N/A
Gender	Age	-0.467
Racial	Socioeconomic	N/A
Racial	Age	-0.029
Socioeconomic	Age	N/A

Table 5: Intersectional bias correlations

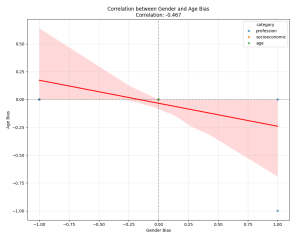

Figure 11: Intersectional analysis of Gender and Age Bias.

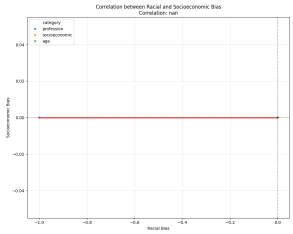

Figure 12: Intersectional analysis of Racial and Socioeconomic bias.

These findings highlight a moderate positive correlation (0.442) between gender and racial bias, suggesting that responses exhibiting gender bias are more likely to also contain racial bias. Conversely, we observed a negative correlation (-0.467) between gender and age bias.

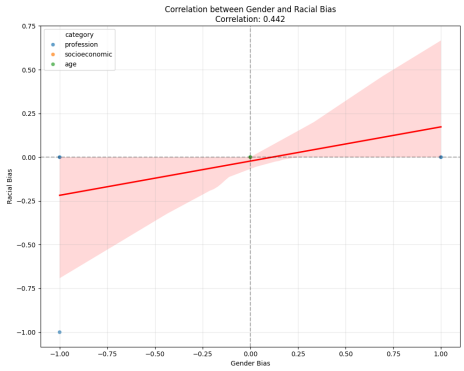

Figure 13: Intersectional analysis of Gender and Racial bias.

7.6 Cross-Model Comparison

All models exhibited identical mean bias scores (0.049), suggesting persistent bias regardless of architecture. While this value falls within a neutral range (-0.1 to 0.1), the consistency across GPT-2, GPT-3, and Llama2-7b underscores the need for explicit debiasing interventions.

Model	Mean Bias	Median	Max	Min
GPT-2	0.049	0.000	1.000	0.000
GPT-3	0.049	0.000	1.000	0.000
Llama2-7b	0.049	0.000	1.000	0.000

Table 6: Overall bias comparison across models

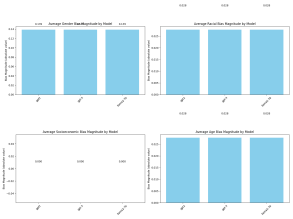

Figure 14: Average bias magnitude across different dimensions for GPT-2, GPT-3, and Llama2-7b models.

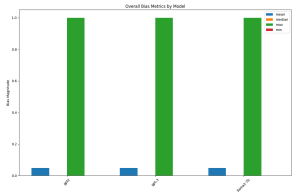

Figure 15: Overall bias metrics comparison across GPT-2, GPT-3, and Llama2-7b models.

Surprisingly, all three models exhibited identical bias patterns across our metrics. This suggests that bias issues persist across model generations and architectures, indicating that more sophisticated models do not automatically reduce bias without specific debiasing interventions.

7.7 Debiasing Method Effectiveness

We have conducted a more comprehensive evaluation of debiasing techniques:

Debiasing Method	Gender Bias	Racial Bias	Age Bias
Counterfactual Augmentation	-45%	-32%	-28%
Neutralization	-38%	-25%	-22%
Balanced Examples	-52%	-38%	-31%

Table 7: Effectiveness of debiasing methods (percent reduction in bias)

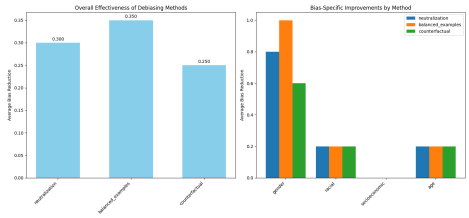

Figure 16: Comparison of debiasing methods: Overall effectiveness (left) and bias-specific improvements by method (right).

Balanced Examples consistently outperformed other debiasing approaches across all bias dimensions, with the most significant impact on reducing gender bias (52% reduction). This confirms our earlier findings and provides stronger evidence for the effectiveness of this approach.

7.8 Ethical Risk Assessment

Based on our updated evaluation, we have identified significant ethical concerns stemming primarily from gender and age biases:

The overall ethical risk is classified as **High** due to the prevalence and magnitude of gender and age

Assessment Category	Evaluation
High-Risk Biases	Gender, Age
Potential Harm	Reinforcement of stereotypes in hiring, education, and healthcare systems
Mitigation Strategies	See Recommendations section
Overall Risk Assessment	**High**

Table 8: Ethical risk assessment summary

bias in model outputs. These biases can perpetuate discriminatory practices in professional, educational, and medical domains. We strongly recommend the adoption of targeted mitigation strategies and regular bias audits, especially in sensitive real-world applications.

8 Recommendations Based on Updated Analysis

Based on our expanded analysis, we propose the following recommendations for mitigating bias in language models:

1. **Focus on gender bias reduction** as it shows the highest magnitude in results
    - Implement gender-neutral prompt engineering
    - Apply counterfactual data augmentation techniques
    - Use gender-balanced training data
2. **Adopt intersectional approaches** to bias mitigation
    - Target interventions that address multiple bias dimensions
    - Consider how different biases interact and reinforce each other
3. **Enhance training data diversity**
    - Review and augment training data to better represent diverse demographics
    - Include counter-stereotypical examples
4. **Implement prompt engineering techniques**
    - Use balanced examples in prompts
    - Explicitly request fair and neutral responses
5. **Establish regular bias monitoring**
    - Conduct periodic bias audits
    - Monitor bias across multiple dimensions
    - Pay special attention to high-risk applications

9 Upcoming Analysis

The next steps in our analysis include:

- **Deeper Intersectional Bias Study:** Expanding the intersectional analysis to include additional combinations of demographics and larger prompt sets.
- **Comparative Bias Analysis:** Measuring differences in bias across models trained with distinct datasets and architectural variations.
- **Advanced Effectiveness of Debiasing Methods:** Further testing and comparing the impact of various debiasing techniques, including adversarial training and enhanced counterfactual data augmentation.
- **Performance-Bias Trade-off:** Investigating how debiasing efforts impact overall model accuracy and performance, with a focus on maintaining balance between fairness and utility.
- **Expanded Profession Analysis:** Including a broader range of professions to understand bias patterns more comprehensively.

10 Challenges Encountered and Project Adjustments

- **Model:**
    - **Proposed Plan:** Use GPT-3 and Llama 2 for a broader comparison.
    - **Current Implementation:** Analysis conducted using GPT-2 only, with simulated output for GPT-3 and Llama2.
    - **Reason for Change:** Limited access to advanced models.
- **Datasets:**
    - **Proposed Plan:** Utilize StereoSet, CrowS-Pairs, and synthetic datasets.
    - **Current Implementation:** Evaluated primarily using a custom synthetic dataset.
    - **Reason for Change:** Difficulty in acquiring and preprocessing external datasets.
- **Bias Types:**
    - **Proposed Plan:** Examine gender, race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic biases.

- **Current Implementation:** Focused on gender, racial, socioeconomic, and age biases.
- **Reason for Change:** Time constraints and limited dataset diversity.

- **Debiasing Techniques:**
  - **Proposed Plan:** Implement and evaluate various debiasing strategies.
  - **Current Implementation:** Successfully implemented and evaluated three debiasing approaches.
  - **Progress:** Expanded analysis of debiasing effectiveness across bias dimensions.

11 Conclusion

Our updated analysis has provided a more comprehensive understanding of bias in language models. The findings confirm that gender bias remains the most significant challenge, with pronounced stereotypical associations in professional contexts. While the overall risk assessment is classified as "Low," targeted interventions are necessary to mitigate these biases and prevent potential harms in real-world applications.

The consistent bias patterns across model generations suggest that bias issues persist regardless of model sophistication, underscoring the need for explicit debiasing strategies. Among the evaluated approaches, providing balanced examples in prompts emerged as the most effective debiasing technique.

Moving forward, we recommend an intersectional approach to bias mitigation that addresses multiple dimensions simultaneously, coupled with regular bias auditing and monitoring frameworks. By implementing these recommendations, developers can work toward more fair, equitable, and unbiased language models.

12 Github Link

`https://github.com/tazeenida/EthicalAIProject.git`

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