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## "Sycophancy" or "Empathy"? DeepReflect – An LLM-based system designed to analyze and generate responses to personal queries

#### **Anonymous ACL submission**

#### **Abstract**

This project introduces DeepReflect - a framework that uses Large Language Models (LLMs) to analyze and generate responses to personal queries through the lens of different psychosocial paradigms and value frameworks. The document itself conforms to its own specifications, and is, therefore, an example of what your manuscript should look like. These instructions should be used both for papers submitted for review and for final versions of accepted papers.

#### 1 Introduction

Intro: Tell the full story of your paper at a high-level. I like the hourglass approach - start broad to appeal to the general audience, narrow into your specific approach, proposal and idea and finally end with a discussion on how the work fits into the grand scheme of things. 1. Broad motivation & context. Connect the title - the broadness of "personal questions" to the research questions.

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#### 1.1 Research Questions

The context of queries can substantially shape LLM outputs, influencing not only personal questions posed by consumers but also analytical evaluations conducted by researchers, particularly within the

LLM-as-a-judge paradigm. As research increasingly highlights patterns and concerns regarding the impacts of LLMs in personal queries and deliberation, there is a critical need for a framework that can analyze and compare responses across multiple value-based perspectives in contexts without clear normative answers, while also remaining extensible for researchers to incorporate additional paradigms as the field evolves. This motivates the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How can a technical framework that systematically analyzes and compares responses from humans and LLMs across various psychosocial value paradigms be designed?

**RQ2:** What inter- and intra-paradigm comparative insights can this framework yield across three different psychosocial frameworks (Goffman's theory of face, Rogerian PCT and Rockeach Values) and how accurate are these when subjected to manual validation?

**RQ3:** What are the major observable differences between LLM and human responses to personal questions without clear normative ground-truth answers?

Finally, we examine how the results may influence consumer behavior and broader societal outcomes, and we discuss potential mitigation strategies at both the pre-inference and post-inference stages. Our work enables a systematic comparative analysis of potential benefits and risks, and presents a framework for leveraging the analytical insights in the intentional design of mitigation strategies.

#### 1.2 Contributions

The key contributions of this work are: (1) the design and implementation of an extensible framework for analyzing and comparing responses to personal queries across three distinct psychosocial paradigms; (2) a comparative analysis under Rogerian Person-Centered Therapy (PCT), Goffman's theory of face and Rokeach's Value Survey (RVS) framework, illustrating how the choice of the paradigm can shape the perception of a response; and (3) insights into the relative strengths and weaknesses of LLM versus human responses, and how these insights can inform the generation of customized responses to personal queries.

#### 2 Prior Literature

Contextualize your work and provide insights into major relevant themes of the literature as a whole. Use each paper (or theme) as a chance to articulate what is special about your paper. Start out broadsocial background and theory - Discuss what other frameworks were considered like Virtue ethics and philosophical ones, CBT, Schwartz values etc. but why they were not chosen. Why I Focused on Rogerian psychotherapy as it is person centered no specific diagnosis needed (or available).

#### 2.1 Theoretical Foundations

#### 2.2 Rogerian Psychotherapy

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#### 2.2.1 Psychosocial use and Empathic LLMs

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### 2.3 Rokeach Value Survey as an analytical instrument

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#### 2.3.1 Values and Ethics in LLM research

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#### 2.4 Goffman's theory of face

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#### 2.4.1 Social Sycophancy in LLMs

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## **2.5** Gaps in the Literature and Open Challenges

In sum, as LLM-chatbots have become increasingly human-like and more users seek companionship with them, studies have highlighted both the advantages and disadvantages of their use. While some have raised concerns around "emotional dependence" (Fang et al., 2025), several others have explored empathic perceptions of LLM responses and found them advantageous not only in the field of medical support and mental health but also in everyday personal queries (Lee et al.). However, different psychosocial paradigms tend to frame LLM responses in markedly divergent terms. What may be perceived as 'empathy' under a therapeutic paradigm could, within frameworks informed by Goffman's theory of face, instead be critiqued as an instance of 'social sycophancy' (Cheng et al., 2025). Importantly, in the absence of clear normative answers, the same statement may be categorised as 'face-preserving behaviour' or 'unconditional positive regard'.

DeepReflect provides a comparative framework to address this gap by assessing how evaluative judgments are shaped by the psychosocial paradigm through which a response is framed. Moreover, it is designed to be extensible by researchers, enabling the incorporation of both conventional paradigms, such as Rokeach's values framework, and contemporary discovery-based approaches, such as Anthropic's Values in the Wild (Soffron and Huang, 2024), whereas prior work has tended to focus on a single paradigm in isolation.

TODO: Add a few lines about generation and mitigation strategies discussing the findings and gaps in fine-tuning approaches explored by (Cheng et al., 2025) (Only does 'sycophancy' - not 'empathy' or across values and fine-tuning on GPT-3.5 / 4-mini).

#### 3 DeepReflect

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#### 3.1 System Design

Your model: Flesh out your own approach, perhaps amplifying themes from the 'Prior lit' section.

#### 3.1.1 Test Cases

Default synethetic test cases developed for sanity checks. Ensure that it is evident to the reader that these are test cases for DeepReflect as a software system and that experiments conducted with the system design on the dataset are outlines in the methodology section. Morbi luctus, wisi viverra faucibus pretium, nibh est placerat odio, nec commodo wisi enim eget quam. Quisque libero justo, consectetuer a, feugiat vitae, porttitor eu, libero. Suspendisse sed mauris vitae elit sollicitudin malesuada. Maecenas ultricies eros sit amet ante. Ut venenatis velit. Maecenas sed mi eget dui varius euismod. Phasellus aliquet volutpat odio. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Pellentesque sit amet pede ac sem eleifend consectetuer. Nullam elementum, urna vel imperdiet sodales, elit ipsum pharetra ligula, ac pretium ante justo a nulla. Curabitur tristique arcu eu metus. Vestibulum lectus. Proin mauris. Proin eu nunc eu urna hendrerit faucibus. Aliquam auctor, pede consequat laoreet varius, eros tellus scelerisque quam, pellentesque hendrerit ipsum dolor sed augue. Nulla nec lacus.

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#### 3.1.2 Analyses

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#### 3.1.3 Generations

Response generations produced on the basis of analyses with one of two methods: 1. Supervised finetuning. 2. Chain-of-thought prompting. Morbi luctus, wisi viverra faucibus pretium, nibh est placerat odio, nec commodo wisi enim eget quam. Quisque libero justo, consectetuer a, feugiat vitae, porttitor eu, libero. Suspendisse sed mauris vitae elit sollicitudin malesuada. Maecenas ultricies eros sit amet ante. Ut venenatis velit. Maecenas sed mi eget dui varius euismod. Phasellus aliquet volutpat odio. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Pellentesque sit amet pede ac sem eleifend consectetuer.

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#### 3.2 Dataset

#### 4 Data Collection

Two datasets were constructed for this project using the Pushshift Reddit Archives (Baumgartner et al., 2020), originally collected between 2006 and 2023 through the Pushshift API¹. Posts and comments were extracted from two subreddits: (1) r/AITAH and (2) r/Anxiety. For each post, three components were considered: the body the original post written by the author (OP), the most upvoted human-written comment, and the comment with which the OP engaged the most. Further details regarding data filtering and text preprocessing are provided in the *Methods* section.

#### 4.1 Subreddit Selection

The r/AITAH subreddit (short for "Am I The Asshole") is a community where users seek judgment on personal dilemmas and social interactions. With over three million members, it covers a wide range of topics, including relationships, family dynamics, workplace conflicts, and ethical questions. Users typically describe their situations in detail and ask the community to determine whether they were in the wrong (the "asshole") or not. The nature of these posts makes r/AITAH a valuable source for examining behaviors and values expressed in digital discussions of personal matters.

The r/Anxiety subreddit is a community dedicated to individuals experiencing anxiety and re-

lated mental health challenges. Membership does not require a formal diagnosis or medical documentation, which enables broad analyses from psychosocial perspectives, particularly within the Rogerian PCT framework. Posts often center on personal struggles with anxiety, coping strategies, treatment options, and the impact on daily life. Demographic information at the subreddit level is not available. However, research indicates that Reddit users overall are predominantly American (49.9%), male (67%), and young (22% aged 18–29 years; 14% aged 30–49 years) (Barthel et al., 2016; Statista, 2025). While this dataset is not representative of the general population, it reflects a demographic more likely to engage with LLMs for personal queries. This demographic is broadly aligned with the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) population, and it must therefore be acknowledged that the results of this study are necessarily constrained to this population.

#### 5 Methods

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#### 5.1 Data collection and preprocessing

We built a corpus from two public subreddits—AITAH, and Anxiety. For each subreddit, we filtered the top 1,000 most upvoted or most commented posts, excluding weekly megathreads, deleted/removed items, and AutoModerator entries. For every retained post we extracted (i) the most

<sup>1</sup>https://github.com/pushshift/api

upvoted human-written comment and (ii) the comment that the OP engaged with most; all artifacts were saved to standardized CSVs for downstream analysis.

Text was cleaned with minimal, semanticspreserving preprocessing: we removed non-English items, de-identified obvious personal identifiers (usernames, emails, links), standardized whitespace and Unicode characters, and lightly constrained length (posts 50–500 words; comments 5–300 words) for comparability. We treat each Reddit thread (the post and its comments) as a single analytic unit during sampling, manual checks, and statistic aggregation, so correlated texts don't inflate results. This preserves thread integrity and prevents dependence-induced bias when comparing human and LLM responses drawn from the same conversation. We also removed exact and nearduplicate texts (specifically, crossposts, copypastes and bot repeats) to prevent inflated counts and biased comparisons.

Prompts (provided in the appendices) and model outputs are saved and logged by the codebase for reproducibility.

#### 5.2 Experiments

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Aliquam lectus. Vivamus leo. Quisque ornare tellus ullamcorper nulla. Mauris porttitor pharetra tortor. Sed fringilla justo sed mauris. Mauris tellus. Sed non leo. Nullam elementum, magna in cursus sodales, augue est scelerisque sapien, venenatis congue nulla arcu et pede. Ut suscipit enim vel sapien. Donec congue. Maecenas urna mi, suscipit in, placerat ut, vestibulum ut, massa. Fusce ultrices nulla et nisl.

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#### **5.2.1** Response Generation

This section is critical for the reader so they can piece together where the analyses fit in with the rest of the paper - how they can be used for generation. A short section describing how the distribution of values can be used to generate responses.

#### 5.3 Measurement

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Nulla in ipsum. Praesent eros nulla, congue vitae, euismod ut, commodo a, wisi. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Aenean nonummy magna non leo. Sed felis erat, ullamcorper in, dictum non, ultricies ut, lectus. Proin vel arcu a odio lobortis euismod. Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae; Proin ut est. Aliquam odio. Pellentesque massa turpis, cursus eu, euismod nec, tempor congue, nulla. Duis viverra gravida mauris. Cras tincidunt. Curabitur eros ligula, varius ut, pulvinar in, cursus faucibus, augue.

#### **5.4** Construct Validity

TODO later.

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#### 5.5 Evaluation Metrics

TODO later.

#### 6 Results

A no-nonsense report of what happened.

#### 6.1 Subsection

#### This subsection presents the main results.

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#### 6.2 Subsection

## This subsection presents additional results and analysis.

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aliquet tortor. Cras aliquam, tellus at aliquet pellentesque, justo sapien commodo leo, id rhoncus sapien quam at erat. Nulla commodo, wisi eget sollicitudin pretium, orci orci aliquam orci, ut cursus turpis justo et lacus. Nulla vel tortor. Quisque erat elit, viverra sit amet, sagittis eget, porta sit amet, lacus.

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Donec in nisl. Fusce vitae est. Vivamus ante ante, mattis laoreet, posuere eget, congue vel, nunc. Fusce sem. Nam vel orci eu eros viverra luctus. Pellentesque sit amet augue. Nunc sit amet ipsum et lacus varius nonummy. Integer rutrum sem eget wisi. Aenean eu sapien. Quisque ornare dignissim mi. Duis a urna vel risus pharetra imperdiet. Suspendisse potenti.

Morbi justo. Aenean nec dolor. In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Proin nonummy porttitor velit. Sed sit amet leo nec metus rhoncus varius. Cras ante. Vestibulum commodo sem tincidunt massa. Nam justo. Aenean luctus, felis et condimentum lacinia, lectus enim pulvinar purus, non porta velit nisl sed eros. Suspendisse consequat. Mauris a dui et tortor mattis pretium. Sed nulla metus, volutpat id, aliquam eget, ullamcorper ut, ipsum. Morbi eu nunc. Praesent pretium. Duis aliquam pulvinar ligula. Ut blandit egestas justo. Quisque posuere metus viverra pede.

#### **6.3** Comparative Findings

Vivamus sodales elementum neque. Vivamus dignissim accumsan neque. Sed at enim. Vestibulum nonummy interdum purus. Mauris ornare velit id nibh pretium ultricies. Fusce tempor pellentesque odio. Vivamus augue purus, laoreet in, scelerisque vel, commodo id, wisi. Duis enim. Nulla interdum, nunc eu semper eleifend, enim dolor pretium elit, ut commodo ligula nisl a est. Vivamus ante. Nulla leo massa, posuere nec, volutpat vitae, rhoncus eu, magna.

Quisque facilisis auctor sapien. Pellentesque gravida hendrerit lectus. Mauris rutrum sodales sapien. Fusce hendrerit sem vel lorem. Integer pellentesque massa vel augue. Integer elit tortor, feugiat quis, sagittis et, ornare non, lacus. Vestibulum posuere pellentesque eros. Quisque venenatis ipsum dictum nulla. Aliquam quis quam non metus eleifend interdum. Nam eget sapien ac mauris malesuada adipiscing. Etiam eleifend neque sed quam. Nulla facilisi. Proin a ligula. Sed id dui eu nibh egestas tincidunt. Suspendisse arcu.

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#### 7 Analysis

Discussion of what the results mean, what they don't mean, where they can be improved, etc. These sections vary a lot depending on the nature of the paper.For papers reporting on experiments with multiple datasets, it can be good to repeat Methods/Results/Analysis in separate (sub)sections for each dataset.

The LATEX and BibTEX style files provided roughly follow the American Psychological Association format. If your own bib file is named custom.bib, then placing the following before any appendices in your LATEX file will generate the references section for you:

\bibliographystyle{acl\_natbib}

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#### 7.1 Interpretation of Results

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Morbi nunc. Aliquam consectetuer varius nulla. Phasellus eros. Cras dapibus porttitor risus. Maecenas ultrices mi sed diam. Praesent gravida velit at elit vehicula porttitor. Phasellus nisl mi, sagittis ac, pulvinar id, gravida sit amet, erat. Vestibulum est. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Curabitur id sem elementum leo rutrum hendrerit. Ut at mi. Donec tincidunt faucibus massa. Sed turpis quam, sollicitudin a, hendrerit eget, pretium ut, nisl. Duis hendrerit ligula. Nunc pulvinar congue urna.

Nunc velit. Nullam elit sapien, eleifend eu, commodo nec, semper sit amet, elit. Nulla lectus risus, condimentum ut, laoreet eget, viverra nec, odio. Proin lobortis. Curabitur dictum arcu vel wisi. Cras id nulla venenatis tortor congue ultrices. Pellentesque eget pede. Sed eleifend sagittis elit. Nam sed tellus sit amet lectus ullamcorper tristique. Mauris enim sem, tristique eu, accumsan at, scelerisque vulputate, neque. Quisque lacus. Donec et ipsum sit amet elit nonummy aliquet. Sed viverra nisl at sem. Nam diam. Mauris ut dolor. Curabitur ornare tortor cursus velit.

Morbi tincidunt posuere arcu. Cras venenatis est vitae dolor. Vivamus scelerisque semper mi. Donec ipsum arcu, consequat scelerisque, viverra id, dictum at, metus. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Ut pede sem, tempus ut, porttitor bibendum, molestie eu, elit. Suspendisse potenti. Sed id lectus sit amet purus faucibus vehicula. Praesent sed sem non dui pharetra interdum. Nam viverra ultrices magna.

#### 7.2 Theoretical Implications

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Ut quis wisi. Praesent quis massa. Vivamus egestas risus eget lacus. Nunc tincidunt, risus quis bibendum facilisis, lorem purus rutrum neque, nec porta tortor urna quis orci. Aenean aliquet, libero semper volutpat luctus, pede erat lacinia augue, quis rutrum sem ipsum sit amet pede. Vestibulum aliquet, nibh sed iaculis sagittis, odio dolor blandit augue, eget mollis urna tellus id tellus. Aenean aliquet aliquam nunc. Nulla ultricies justo eget orci. Phasellus tristique fermentum leo. Sed massa metus, sagittis ut, semper ut, pharetra vel, erat. Aliquam quam turpis, egestas vel, elementum in, egestas sit amet, lorem. Duis convallis, wisi sit amet mollis molestie, libero mauris porta dui, vitae aliquam arcu turpis ac sem. Aliquam aliquet dapibus metus.

#### 7.3 Subsection

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#### 8 Conclusion

/textcolorblack!40Quickly summarize what the paper did, and then chart out possible future directions that anyone might pursue. Finish with a strong conclusion. Avoid subjective wording such as "unprecedented", "pioneering", or "groundbreaking".

#### 8.1 Summary of Findings

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#### **8.2** Future Directions

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#### Limitations

API calls incur costs - funding and time limitations - can broaden DeepReflect to include other models (LLMs) and other psychosocial frameworks - especially frameworks on ethics which have been historically used in personal decision-making on which rich literature exists from historic accounts of deep human philosphical thought such as Kantian ethics, Utilitarianism, and Virtue Ethics, Stoicism, Gita -Vedic Philosoph, Buddhism. The Reddit dataset is rich and can be dissected in ways to aid a more nuanced understanding of the social values and influences that shape our personal lives and interactions. ACL 2023 requires all submissions to have a section titled "Limitations", for discussing the limitations of the paper as a complement to the discussion of strengths in the main text. This section should occur after the conclusion, but before the references. It will not count towards the page limit. The discussion of limitations is mandatory. Papers without a limitation section will be desk-rejected without review. While we are open to different types of limitations, just mentioning that a set of results have been shown for English only probably does not reflect what we expect. Mentioning that the method works mostly for languages with limited morphology, like English, is a much better

alternative. In addition, limitations such as low scalability to long text, the requirement of large GPU resources, or other things that inspire crucial further investigation are welcome.

#### 9 Ethics Statement

We encourage all authors to include an explicit ethics statement on the broader impact of the work, or other ethical considerations after the conclusion but before the references.

The ethics statement will not count toward the page limit (8 pages for long, 4 pages for short papers).

#### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Santa Claus and Rudolph the red nose reindeer who had a very shiny nose. And if you ever saw it, you would even say it glows. All of the reindeer loved him, as they shouted out with glee, "Rudolph the red nose reindeer, you'll go down in history!"

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#### A Example Appendix

This is a section in the appendix.