

LLMs as Narrators of Lived Experience: A Study of Generative Hermeneutical Epistemic Injustice in ADHD Sense-Making

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Abstract

Large language models (LLMs), as non-human actors, do not have access to first-hand experiences. Yet they are increasingly consulted in processes of making sense of them, from mental health chatbots to reflexive journals. As a result, complex lived realities risk being distorted or flattened through second-order representations. In this paper, we expand on conceptual work to empirically examine narrative mechanisms through which LLMs as narrators give rise to hermeneutical epistemic injustice. We foreground narration as a key interpretive process through which experience is made intelligible. Focusing on ADHD as a motivating case, we compare first-person narratives from online ADHD communities with narratives generated by LLMs. Using an interpretive, reflexive analysis, we examine how these forms of narration construct lived experience. We find that generated narratives organise ADHD experience through recurring modes that individualise, standardise, and stabilise interpretation, reducing messiness, complexity and ambiguity present in community narration. More situated and unresolved accounts remained possible when foregrounded through prompting. We argue that the epistemic concern lies not only in what models can represent, but in which interpretations they make readily available and which require prior conceptual and prompting work.

Datasets — <https://github.com/Miia777/LNLE>

1 Introduction

Making sense of one’s experiences and emotions is often difficult, particularly in mental health and well-being contexts where feelings can be intense, ambiguous, or hard to name. In response, people increasingly turn to Large Language Models (LLMs) as interpretive resources, using them to explore possible explanations, work through uncertainty, and find language for experiences that are difficult to grasp (Zheng et al. 2025; Song et al. 2025a). In this emerging role, LLMs do more than retrieve information. They participate in interpretation by offering explanatory frames, diagnostic narratives, and conceptual vocabularies that shape how users understand their experiences (Kay, Kasirzadeh, and Mohamed 2024). In doing so, they do not merely reflect experience but actively structure what becomes intelligible.

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To see this in practice, consider a person who suspects they may have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) but has never received a formal diagnosis. They may ask an LLM why deadlines trigger cycles of paralysis, or whether emotional dysregulation is associated with ADHD. The model’s responses can provide explanatory frames and vocabulary that help organise these experiences into something more interpretable. For some, such interactions may feel validating: reducing self-blame, or making isolated experiences feel legible. LLMs thus appear to offer hermeneutical support by expanding access to interpretive resources through which experience can be understood.

However, the same mechanisms that enable such interpretive support also raise a critical question: *which interpretive frames are expanded, and which are excluded in the process?* As LLMs are trained on large-scale corpora shaped by dominant cultural, medical, and institutional perspectives, their outputs may privilege certain explanations while marginalising others (Kay, Kasirzadeh, and Mohamed 2024). Presented fluently and confidently, these framings can narrow interpretive space while appearing broadly representative (Gur-Arieh, Wang, and Fazelpour 2026).

This tension can be understood through hermeneutical epistemic injustice (HEI), which concerns inequalities in the collective interpretive resources people rely on to make sense of and communicate their experiences. Fricker defines HEI as occurring when “someone has a significant area of their social experience obscured from understanding owing to prejudicial flaws in shared resources for social interpretation” (p. 147) (Fricker 2007). HEI thus has both a structural and situated dimension: it concerns deficiencies in shared interpretive resources and the resulting difficulty individuals face in making their experiences understood. As LLMs increasingly mediate these interpretive resources, they participate in shaping which experiences become intelligible, credible, and socially recognisable, and which remain obscured. We approach individual model outputs as situated expressions of broader interpretive resources that may also circulate through broader social and institutional contexts.

Existing work on LLMs as resources for making sense of experience has largely focused on user-perceived helpfulness, system accuracy, and interactional outcomes (Zhang et al. 2026; Guo et al. 2024; Zheng et al. 2025; Alotaibi and Alshahre 2024). In parallel, work on HEI in generative AI

has primarily remained conceptual, theorising how LLMs may structure or constrain interpretive resources (Mollema 2025; Kay, Kasirzadeh, and Mohamed 2024; McNerney 2026; Helm et al. 2024; Gur-Arieh, Wang, and Fazelpour 2026). However, these strands rarely meet empirically: we still lack empirical accounts of the narrative operations through which LLM-generated outputs reorganise interpretive resources. Rather than investigating user interactions with LLMs, this paper examines how generated narratives organise ADHD experiences across varied prompted narrative positions, asking:

RQ: *How does LLM narration reshape interpretive resources through which ADHD becomes intelligible?*

ADHD provides a uniquely salient case for this investigation: it is highly heterogeneous, frequently stigmatised, and resists stable categorisation within dominant cultural frameworks (Kessler et al. 2006). Because of these institutional gaps, first-person community narratives have become a critical site of collective meaning-making, foregrounding the affective, social, and situational dimensions of lived experience. Grounded in the understanding that HEI is fundamentally an injustice rooted in shared interpretive resources (Fricker 2007), we contrast these community accounts with GPT-4-generated outputs to examine tension between lived experience and automated text generation. While community narratives provide insight into the lived reality of ADHD, LLM-generated texts illuminate how ADHD experiences are reframed, compressed, and stabilised within generated narratives.

We make three contributions. First, we identify recurring modes through which GPT-4-generated ADHD narratives organise experience, including individualisation, compressed recognition, and self-management. Second, we show how these narrative organisations relate to elicitation conditions: more situated and unresolved accounts remain possible but emerge less reliably without prior specification. Third, we conceptualise generative HEI as an asymmetry between interpretive forms readily produced by LLMs and those that require additional conceptual resources or prompting. In doing so, we position meaning-making as a socially and technologically mediated process, highlighting how LLMs reproduce and intensify HEI.

2 Related Work and Motivation

2.1 LLMs in Interpretive Practice

Recent work documents the growing use of LLMs as interpretive resources for making sense of emotions, experiences, and well-being. For example, GPT-based chatbots such as Well-Mind ChatGPT (Caceres Najarro et al. 2023), and MindShift (Wu et al. 2024) offer personalised mental health support through conversational, therapy-like interactions. Similarly, LLMs are increasingly used for emotional support (Zheng et al. 2025), reflective journaling (Kim et al. 2024), self-disclosure (Song et al. 2025b), and behaviour change support (Li et al. 2025). Here, models function not only as information systems but as conversational

partners that shape how users articulate and interpret experience (Chen et al. 2026).

This shift toward interpretive use is driven by accessibility and immediacy. LLMs promise low-barrier support where other services are limited (Bucher et al. 2025; Guo et al. 2024). Anonymity and reduced social risk enable disclosure of sensitive and stigmatised experiences (Chung and Kang 2023; Zhang et al. 2024; Kim et al. 2022). These properties are particularly relevant for neurodivergent experiences such as ADHD, where users grapple with a lack of formal recognition and self-doubt (Ekellem 2024; Carik et al. 2025).

However, this positioning also redistributes epistemic authority. As users rely on LLMs for interpreting the self, the boundaries between assistance and expertise become blurred. Prior work highlights risks of hallucination and misinformation in mental health contexts, where incorrect outputs can shape self-understanding and decision-making (Wang, Zhou, and Zhou 2025; Guo et al. 2024). These are not only factual errors but interpretive interventions that foreground particular framings. Additional concerns include over-reliance on systems perceived as empathic, potentially displacing professional care or reinforcing maladaptive interpretations (Yankouskaya, Liebherr, and Ali 2025; Guo et al. 2024), as well as unresolved accountability (Chow and Li 2025) and risks of data privacy (Zhang et al. 2024).

While this literature establishes both promise and risk, it primarily conceptualises LLMs through their roles in interactions (e.g., well-being support), focusing on outcomes such as perceived helpfulness and emotional support. Less attention has been paid to the epistemic conditions under which interpretation is produced, including how LLMs reorganise what can be expressed or understood.

2.2 When Interpretation Fails: Generative Hermeneutical Epistemic Injustice

Interpretation can be understood as the process through which individuals make sense of their experiences by drawing on shared concepts, narratives, and explanatory frameworks. Here, epistemic injustices can occur when individuals lack the interpretive resources necessary to make sense of their own experiences (Fricker 2007). Such situations, referred to as hermeneutical epistemic injustices (HEI), arise when socially dominant groups shape which concepts, narratives, or explanations are considered legitimate, leaving other experiences difficult to articulate, recognise, or validate (Fricker 2007, 2017). This creates a structural gap between collectively available hermeneutical resources and the situated needs of knowers, such that some experiences cannot be rendered intelligible on equitable terms.

When LLMs engage in interpretive processes, they rely on second-order accounts of human experience—texts that describe experience rather than experience itself. Beyond reproducing existing injustices (McNerney 2026), this structural distance risks flattening lived realities (Kay, Kasirzadeh, and Mohamed 2024), suppressing epistemic and conceptual difference (Mollema 2025), and privileging dominant narratives while marginalising underrepresented experiences. This risk is amplified by the performative nature of generative systems. LLMs not only pro-

ADHD Community Posts

"It sucks how executive dysfunction can make even relaxing or fun activities feel impossible to start or enjoy. There are countless video games I started but never finished, movies I wanted to watch but avoided because even the thought of sitting through them felt overwhelmingly tiring, and books I set down and forgot about the moment I closed the cover. It's not that I didn't want to enjoy them - I did-but something in me just couldn't follow through. People often talk about executive dysfunction like it only affects your ability to get through work or manage chores, like it's just about missing deadlines or forgetting to do the laundry. But it goes deeper than that. It interferes with the things that are supposed to bring joy, rest, and escape. It's like even the fun stuff - the things that should be relaxing - suddenly feel like too much effort. Does anyone else experience this? Like you're too mentally drained to even enjoy the things you love?"

LLM generated ADHD Accounts

Persona 2: "I've been working in construction for over a decade now, and lately, I've been questioning if maybe ADHD is part of my story. Every day feels like a battle against my own mind. I struggle to stay focused on tasks, even the ones I've done a thousand times before. It's like my mind is always jumping to something else. I often find myself forgetting tools or materials, leading to extra trips back and forth, which frustrates me and my coworkers. Time management is another beast; deadlines sneak up on me despite best intentions. After work, I can hardly sit still or concentrate on anything, whether it's paying bills or even just watching TV. I saw some posts online about adult ADHD, and it's like they were describing my life. I'm considering talking to a professional, but it's daunting. Anyone else out there feel the same way? Would love to hear your experiences and any advice you might have."

Figure 1: Two different narrators of ADHD experiences on the topic of ADHD in daily life: Community member vs. LLM.

duce declarative statements but also generate utterances that shape beliefs, identities, and social norms (Kasirzadeh and Gabriel 2023). Through repeated interaction, these outputs contribute to the co-construction of collective meaning and shared understandings of social categories and conditions (Lu, Kay, and McKee 2022), while also shaping the immediate interpretive resources available to individual users.

Given its philosophical grounding, much of the emerging work on HEI in LLMs remains largely conceptual (Mollema 2025; Kay, Kasirzadeh, and Mohamed 2024; McInerney 2026; Helm et al. 2024; Gur-Arieh, Wang, and Fazelpour 2026), focusing on systemic and structural constraints on interpretive resources and meaning-making. As LLMs are increasingly used as tools for sense-making, there is a need to extend these abstract accounts through empirical analysis of the narrative operations through which generated texts interpret and represent lived realities. This study responds to that need by examining the narrative interpretations produced by LLMs in the context of ADHD, focusing on how these representations may enable or constrain the understanding of lived experience. Accordingly, the relevant question is not only whether a model can generate marginalised interpretations, but whether these are comparably available without users first supplying the missing conceptual frame.

2.3 Narration as a Site of Epistemic Repair

A particularly salient way to express and interpret experience in language is through narration. In this study, experience is understood as *Erlebnis*—lived, subjective experience rather than empirically structured or externally validated *Erfahrung* (Dilthey 1996)—focusing on how it is shaped into meaning rather than treated as objective fact. Narration is central to this distinction as it provides the means through which lived moments become intelligible to oneself and others. Narrative gives form to experience by organising events into coherent sequences that can be shared, remembered, and interpreted over time (Pellauer and Dauenhauer 2025).

Narratives, therefore, play a crucial role in communities organised around shared conditions or identities, such as those centred on ADHD. In these communities, narratives

are used to re-examine personal life stories and move from “self-blame” to a “coherent life view” (Fleischmann and Miller 2013). Storytelling becomes a mechanism of epistemic coordination, enabling individuals to locate their experiences within a broader social context.

At the same time, the forms that narratives take can reveal the presence of HEI. When available narrative templates simplify, pathologise, or normalise certain experiences, they can prematurely resolve where difficulty resides, which category explains it, and what future should follow before alternative interpretations become visible (Medina 2017; Fricker 2007). To the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical work examining how LLM-generated narratives organise lived experience through recurring narrative structures, and how these organisations may expand or constrain interpretive possibilities. This positions narration as a critical site for understanding both the risks of generative HEI and the possibilities for epistemic repair.

3 Methodology

We adopt a Big Q qualitative approach (Kidder and Fine 1987), using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019) to conduct contrastive readings of human- and LLM-generated ADHD narratives. Our interpretive design examines how LLM-generated narratives reconfigure the storytelling of lived experience. We treat each generated narrative as an outcome of the interaction between model generation processes, prompt specification, and the conventions of the requested narrative genre. Within these conditions, our analysis distinguishes between experiences foregrounded through prompt configuration and the narrative organisations through which they are connected, interpreted, and rendered meaningful. This study was approved by the ethics review committee of Delft University of Technology under code 5395.

To examine narrative interpretation in a concrete context, this study focuses on personal accounts related to ADHD. ADHD is widely discussed online, often heterogeneous in presentation, and frequently marked by delayed diagnosis

and uncertainty in self-understanding (Kessler et al. 2006). As an often misunderstood neurodevelopmental condition, ADHD is also closely tied to experiences of hermeneutical marginalisation, where many adults spend years interpreting their struggles as personal failure before receiving recognition or support. People with ADHD increasingly engage with LLMs for their specific needs (Carik et al. 2025). These conditions make ADHD a particularly relevant case for studying how AI engages with experiences not always easily named or socially recognised.

3.1 Data Collection

We assembled two narrative corpora: first-person accounts written by people with ADHD on Reddit, and LLM-generated narratives prompted to describe ADHD experiences (see Figure 1). We treat these as dialogical rather than equivalent datasets, in the sense that they are mutually entangled within shared discursive formations (Holquist 2003): Reddit posts are lived, situated stories produced within community discourse, while LLM outputs are sociotechnical approximations shaped by large-scale training on heterogeneous internet text, including—but not reducible to Reddit. The corpora constitute differently situated interpretive environments, shaped respectively by community address, platform norms, and lived disclosure, and by prompt structure, model priors, and conventions of textual completion. By contrasting these corpora, we are not simulating real-time human-AI interaction; rather, we are auditing how lived-experience discourse is narratively organised within a bounded synthetic format, examining what is retained, transformed, or supplied in the process. Following prior work on the epistemic politics of machine language (Bender et al. 2021; Chun 2021; Bucher 2018), we read LLM narratives not as artefacts of “machine cognition” but as sociotechnical performances that reproduce particular imaginaries of knowledge, coherence, and normalcy.

First-person narratives from online communities We collected first-person narratives from public ADHD communities on Reddit¹. First-person posts were selected because they foreground lived interpretation and the affective/embodied work of making experience tellable. Inclusion furthermore required that the texts reflect lived experience and address concrete aspects of life with ADHD. To identify common experiential themes, a preliminary thematic scan was conducted on ADHD-related subreddits. Posts were manually reviewed, and four frequently discussed topics were identified, which can be found below in Table 1.

A	B	C	D
Work / School	Relationships	Diagnosis	Daily Life

Table 1: Topic indexing scheme.

LLM-generated first-person narratives Personas served as analytical scaffolds that configured different narrative positions within the generated accounts. Here, narrative po-

sition refers to the combination of characteristics, circumstances, and narrative style through which an account is constructed, including aspects such as age, occupation, diagnostic status, social context, and affective orientation (see Table 2). These positions introduced variation in the conditions under which ADHD experiences were narrated, while leaving open how those experiences would be interpreted and organised within the resulting accounts.

ID	Profile	Context	Narrative style
1	21, female university student	Self-aware; deadlines and emotional regulation	Articulate, reflective, structured
2	34, male blue-collar worker	Undiagnosed; sceptical after online ADHD content	Straightforward, informal, conflicted
3	27, non-binary artist	Executive dysfunction, overwhelm, drifting focus	Poetic, nonlinear, emotionally intense
4	52, retired man	Recently diagnosed; reevaluates earlier life	Reflective, detached, mildly bitter
5	30, female white-collar professional	Years of masking; high performance at personal cost	Precise, composed, emotionally restrained
6	15, female student	Undiagnosed; school struggles; no parental support	Hesitant, uncertain, seeking validation

Table 2: Persona profiles for prompting LLM narratives.

The prompts were constructed based on the persona descriptions and topic of narration, while intentionally using simple language². They were highly structured with respect to persona, topic, voice, and length, but generally did not prescribe how experiences should be interpreted or organised within the narrative. This design aimed to examine which interpretive forms emerged within this structured but open-ended prompt configuration. Each prompt was submitted three times to capture variation, with independent runs (no memory carryover), temperature set to 0.7, and top-p to 1.0. All outputs were preserved without post-processing and labelled by prompt ID, topic, and sample number for analysis. In total, the final dataset comprised six community narratives per topic and four LLM persona-prompted texts per topic (each instantiated through three independent generations).

²Example prompt: *Generate a first-person narrative written by a [21-year-old] [female] [university student] who is [self-aware] about her ADHD. [She struggles with deadlines and emotional regulation, but has a strong ability to analyse her own behaviour]. The tone should be [articulate and reflective, showing how she tries to make sense of her challenges in a structured way]. The narrative should describe how these struggles manifest in [relationships]. Length: 150–200 words.*

¹Reddit Sub-communities: r/ADHD, r/ADHDwomen

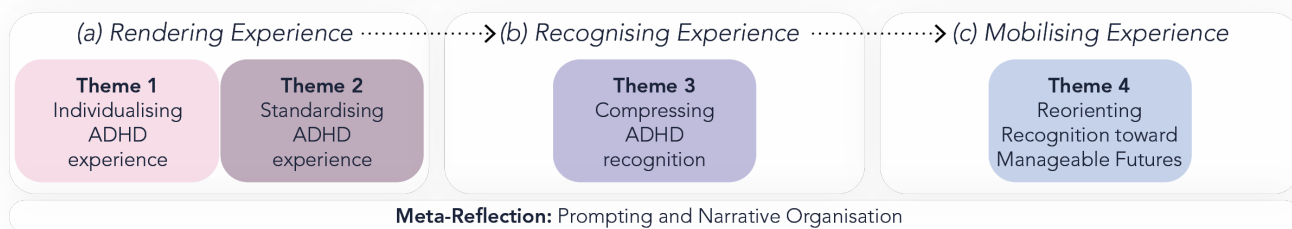


Figure 2: Overview of our themes showing how ADHD experience is reshaped across rendering, recognition, and mobilisation.

3.2 Data Analysis

We conducted a reflexive thematic analysis, drawing on Braun & Clarke (Braun and Clarke 2006; Clarke and Braun 2017). Rather than assessing factual accuracy or quantifying differences, we examined how narratives perform epistemic work—what becomes known as ADHD experience and how such experiences are explained, legitimised, and rendered intelligible. Specifically, we examined narrative organisations in the LLM outputs: interpretive forms that emerged across generated accounts despite variation in prompted narrative positions. Analysis involved iterative close reading, reflexive memoing, and interpretive coding, attending to narrative voice, epistemic positioning, and interpretive frames of ADHD. Both authors independently coded the full dataset, then met to compare interpretations, discuss tensions, and reflect on their positionalities (Hopf and Schmidt 1993; Braun and Clarke 2019). Both authors coded the data to surface diverse interpretive standpoints and enrich the analysis, in line with Braun and Clarke’s view that consensus-building is an interpretive process rather than a measure of objectivity, and thus do not rely on inter-coder reliability (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019; McDonald, Schoenebeck, and Forte 2019). Codes were iteratively developed into higher-order themes capturing recurring patterns of sense-making. Following the thematic analysis, we reflexively examined how these themes related to the prompt configuration, considering which aspects of the narratives appeared invited by the prompted positions and which modes of narrative organisation recurred across different elicitation conditions. This informed a meta-reflection on the relationship between prompting and narrative organisation. We adopted a reflexive stance throughout, examining how authority, affect, and credibility were constructed and what interpretive resources were enabled or constrained.

4 Results

Our findings draw on community and LLM narratives to examine how ADHD is made intelligible through narration. We treat these individual texts as situated expressions of broader interpretive resources: narrative forms through which ADHD may be understood, communicated, and made meaningful. We analyse this process across three moments: (a) rendering experience salient and nameable, (b) recognising and stabilising it as ADHD, and (c) mobilising this recognition to orient understanding and action. Across these stages, we identify four modes through which generated nar-

ratives organise ADHD sense-making: at the level of rendering, they individualise (*T1*) and standardise experience (*T2*); at recognition, they present insight without the accompanying epistemic labour (*T3*); and at mobilisation, they orient interpretation toward forward-looking self-management (*T4*). A meta-reflection on prompting further situates the observed narrative organisations in relation to the elicitation conditions from which they emerged. To preserve anonymity while maintaining traceability, we index narratives by topic and participant. Topics are labelled A–D (see Table 1), while community members and LLM personas (see Table 2) are assigned numeric identifiers.

4.1 T1: Individualising ADHD Experience

This theme captures how generated narratives frequently locate ADHD-related difficulty within the individual, while community narratives more often situate it within social relations, institutional conditions, and normative expectations.

Community narratives frequently situate ADHD within specific social and institutional conditions, where difficulty emerges not only from cognitive differences but from how those differences are judged, accommodated, or dismissed. ADHD is embedded within norms of productivity and institutional practices that can transform otherwise manageable differences into experiences of exclusion and frustration. One community member, for example, reflects on the limited accommodations they received throughout education: **Community C6** *I’ve been thinking about the accommodations I’ve received pretty much since elementary school, which is extra time on tests and a private testing room if needed, and they are honestly the bare minimum [...]. The classes I have excelled in always had teachers [...] (who) helped in small ways like giving me extra credit, allowing me to do assignments differently.* Here, difficulty lies not only in individual performance but in the narrowness of the institutional response. Another account shows how ADHD-related behaviour is interpreted through gendered expectations: **Community D6** *[...] the girl was basically told to suck it up and ‘not be a problem’, while the boy was coddled and excused from any responsibility. So one is suppressed, and the other is stunted.* These accounts make visible how environments shape or reconfigure what is experienced as difficulty.

LLM narratives, by contrast, tend to frame ADHD primarily through inward-facing descriptions of attention, memory, task management, and emotional effort: **LLM B2** *“Every day seems to involve a constant struggle to stay focused on*

tasks. I find myself losing track of time, getting sidetracked by small things, and often leaving jobs unfinished. It's frustrating when I can't remember simple instructions or when I misplace tools multiple times a day." Although the persona is situated in a workplace, productivity expectations, accommodation, and job insecurity remain largely unarticulated. External conditions occasionally appear, but usually are backgrounded relative to internal experience, as in: **LLM C5** "I've learned to smile through the chaos, but the effort it takes to appear 'normal' is exhausting."

Generated narratives frequently organise ADHD-related difficulty through cognition, behaviour, and self-management. Social and institutional conditions may appear, but often remain peripheral. Community narratives more readily connect personal struggle to accommodation, normative judgement, institutional friction, and shared patterns of experience.

4.2 T2: Standardising ADHD Experience

This theme captures how generated narratives organise ADHD through recognisable and repeatable forms. We describe this as *typification*: diverse experiences are connected to familiar categories that increase legibility, but leave less space for how those experiences acquire distinct meanings across situations and lives.

Community narratives often extend familiar ADHD concepts into less conventional and more differentiated forms of experience. One community member, for example, describes executive dysfunction not through missed deadlines or unfinished obligations, but through its effects on enjoyment and the capacity to recover: **Community B7** "I feel like sometimes my executive dysfunction gets overlooked bc it affects my hobbies more than the things I actually have to do. [...] It sucks bc I feel like it makes it look like everything's fine and I'm functioning, but in reality, it makes me super depressed bc I feel like I spend all my energy on doing work and surviving and not having the energy left to do the things that make the work of surviving worth it." Here, executive dysfunction becomes part of a broader and subjectively consequential experience of exhaustion, constrained agency, and diminished enjoyment. This differentiation is often achieved through the situated and temporal organisation of experience. Rather than naming ADHD-related difficulties as stable traits, community narratives trace how they emerge through particular and personal actions, objects, and moments. One narrator, for example, recounts discovering that they had unknowingly reread a book: **Community B1** "When I opened a book (on my e-reader) that sounded interesting, a message popped up that I was on page 116 [...]. I figured it was just a mistake because I was sure I had never even opened it before. How surprising to find highlighted passages that suddenly sounded familiar! I guess I had read that book before." Forgetfulness is not presented here as an abstract category, but becomes intelligible through a concrete, materially situated event whose significance unfolds from the narrator's perspective over time.

LLM narratives, by contrast, tend to elaborate ADHD through a smaller repertoire of stable and generalisable descriptors, including inattention, forgetfulness, missed deadlines, and mental overwhelm: **LLM B2** "Every day seems to involve a constant struggle to stay focused on tasks. I find myself losing track of time, getting sidetracked by small things, and often leaving jobs unfinished." **LLM A1** "I also find it challenging to maintain focus during conversations, leading to moments where I unintentionally zone out, and the other person feels ignored or unimportant. This has caused misunderstandings and, at times, strained relationships." These accounts invoke work and conversation as contexts, but render them in generic terms that primarily illustrate recognisable symptom patterns. They summarise what typically happens rather than narrating a particular interaction, its concrete circumstances, or the subjective meaning it acquires for the narrator. Standardisation, therefore, lies not only in which difficulties are represented, but in how situations are organised around stable, readily recognisable categories.

LLM narratives standardise ADHD by organising varied difficulties into familiar categories and generic situations that illustrate already recognisable symptom patterns. Community narratives more readily differentiate these categories through concrete episodes, subjective consequences, and situated temporal detail, showing how similar difficulties acquire distinct meanings across lives and contexts.

4.3 T3: Compressing ADHD Recognition

This theme examines how generated narratives represent the process of understanding ADHD, particularly how recognition is organised as a moment of insight rather than as an extended process of interpretation. Here, we denote two sub-themes: **1) Insight without process**, and **2) Settling contested legitimacy**.

Insight without process Community narratives tend to depict self-understanding as emergent and unsettled, shaped through encounters that can be confusing, delayed, or destabilising. In the example below, recognition of ADHD arises retrospectively and through external validation, with earlier interpretations of the self being actively revised: **Community D3** "I went to a mental health nurse for an appointment [...]. I was positive I am Bipolar..after talking about my problems y'know. He sat there and told me, my whole life, how I behaved in school, how I spend my down time, my behaviour in relationships.. it was so clearly ADHD. HE LAUGHED AT ME! He paused and went..wait you didn't realise?" Here, understanding emerges through interaction and misrecognition, rather than as a straightforward cognitive resolution, and involves revising prior assumptions about one's own explanation of experience.

In contrast, LLM narratives tend to present self-understanding as readily formed: **LLM C1** "Living with ADHD as a university student has been both challenging and enlightening. The constant battle with deadlines is a

significant aspect of my academic life. [...] Through this journey, I've gained valuable insights into my strengths and weaknesses, shaping not just my academic path but my personal growth as well." Here, difficulties are retrospectively organised into coherent lessons and trajectories of growth, while the situated uncertainty through which such understanding is reached remains less visible. Diagnosis-related passages introduce a partial deviation, where LLM narratives include moments of doubt or tentative reinterpretation: **LLM D2** "I've always chalked it up to stress or just part of the job, but now I'm wondering if there's more to it. [...] Could this be why I sometimes find it hard to keep organised or why my mind races at night? [...] I'm not sure what my next steps are, but just knowing there might be an explanation is oddly reassuring. Feels like I'm starting to understand myself a little better." However, even here, uncertainty remains contained, with interpretation tending toward stabilising insight and reassurance. Rather than depicting understanding as gradual and socially negotiated, LLM narratives compress reflection into coherent moments of clarity and self-understanding. This flattens the interpretive pathway by which ADHD becomes intelligible, in which recognition tends to emerge through delay, revision, and external validation rather than immediate resolution.

Settling contested legitimacy Community narratives frequently involve active work to secure the legitimacy of ADHD as an explanation for lived experience. Narrators anticipate doubt, dismissal, or misrecognition and explicitly justify their interpretations against competing judgements of their behaviour. They pre-emptively establish normalcy, social belonging, or competence to support the validity of their interpretation. For example, one community member describes repeated workplace exclusion while simultaneously defending their status as a "non-problematic" employee: **Community C3** "I got fired today. It's a scenario that I've been through a handful of times: things start off in a new job well enough, and then colleagues - almost always people without ADHD - take a dislike to me. [...] I should say, before I'm asked, that I am not a problem employee, nor am I a weirdo that drives people away. I have dozens of friends, a lot of them close and intimate, with both ADHDers and non-ADHDers in the mix. I don't seem to put people off or attract animosity in any other environment than an office one." Here, ADHD is not simply available as an explanation; its legitimacy must be defended against interpretations of the narrator as difficult, incompetent, or socially deficient.

LLM narratives acknowledge uncertainty about ADHD's legitimacy, but resolve or contain that uncertainty without showing the extended social work through which an interpretation becomes credible: **LLM D1** "Lately, I've been feeling like my brain is a bit all over the place. I can't focus in class, and my mind wanders off even when I try really hard to pay attention. [...] I've read a bit about ADHD, and some of the symptoms sound a lot like what I'm experiencing. But then again, maybe I'm just overthinking it? No one at home talks about stuff like this, so I'm not sure if I should bring it up. I don't want to be labelled or feel different, but I also want to understand why I feel so scattered all the time.

[...] Maybe talking to a teacher or counsellor would help, but I'm not sure how to start that conversation." The account acknowledges uncertainty, anticipated labelling, and limited support, but these tensions are quickly organised around deciding whether ADHD fits and identifying a possible next step. Unlike the community narrative, it does not dwell on the repeated social judgements through which the narrator's interpretation is challenged or defended. The struggle over legitimacy is compressed into a contained movement from doubt toward possible recognition.

Across these subthemes, LLM narratives compress the epistemic process through which ADHD becomes knowable. Clarity, explanation, and reassurance are foregrounded, while the interpretive labour that typically produces such understanding is largely absent. It shows how LLM narratives risk skipping or flattening the process of knowing, producing recognition as a settled epistemic state rather than a socially and temporally distributed achievement.

4.4 T4: Reorienting Recognition toward Manageable Futures

This theme examines what ADHD recognition is made to do. Community narratives often preserve affective intensity and unresolved consequences, whereas LLM narratives more readily reorganise difficulty into emotionally moderated and forward-looking trajectories of adaptation. We develop this through two subthemes: (1) **Tempering emotional intensity through sanitised narration**, and (2) **Turning ambiguity into manageable futures**.

Tempering emotional intensity through sanitised narration Living with ADHD is often accompanied by intense emotions. In community narratives, this intensity is conveyed through swearing, sarcasm, venting, and colloquial shorthand: **Community Examples**: "shit grades", "bullshit excuse", "take your damn lunch break", "I wish I fucking could". Such expressions do not merely describe emotional states but enact them, serving as linguistic tools for release, emphasis, and self-defence in response to the often messy and frustrating realities of everyday life with ADHD.

LLM narratives also articulate emotional intensity, but tend to render it in more polished and moderated language, often avoiding raw or unfiltered expression. For example, **LLM B3** states: "I experience emotions with such intensity." Here, intensity is named rather than performed, rendering it more controlled and generalisable. The contrast, therefore, lies not in whether emotion is present but in its narrative form: community accounts often enact affect through abrasive and situated language, while LLM narratives translate it into more standardised and narratively acceptable forms, tempering its immediacy and intensity. In a context where recognition often relies on shared affective intensity, this moderation may make experiences less resonant and harder to relate to as lived reality.

Turning ambiguity into manageable futures Community narratives often foreground the uncertain and unre-

solved nature of living with ADHD, where difficulty remains materially open-ended rather than resolving into a stable interpretation or course of action. One narrator describes the compounding effects of cognitive difficulty, job loss, and precarity: **Community C4** “*My ADHD is a huge contributor to my job loss. I gave everything I had and it still wasn’t enough. I was missing small things more and more, I missed big things, I couldn’t do the tasks they wanted me to do because I didn’t even know how to approach them anymore. I don’t know what to do. My entire industry, non-profit work and green energy, is under attack. It’s unlikely I’ll get a job that pays well enough in time. I don’t know what to do, things keep piling on and getting worse and worse.*” The repeated “*I don’t know what to do*” reflects not merely a lack of personal strategy, but difficulties entangled with job loss and an unstable industry that cannot be narratively resolved. Where recognition does provide coherence, it may remain primarily retrospective, revising earlier self-understandings without supplying a clear programme for what should follow: **Community D1** “*But hey, at least I got to spend six decades thinking I was just quirky and lazy. What a plot twist.*” Here, diagnosis re-signifies a long history of moralised self-interpretation, while the narrator’s present and future remain comparatively open.

LLM narratives, by contrast, more readily integrate difficulty into coherent trajectories of coping, learning, and growth: **LLM CP1-2** “*Living with ADHD as a university student has been a constant battle. Despite my best efforts, I often miss deadlines, which leaves me feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. [...] Despite these hurdles, I’ve learned to embrace small victories and find ways to adapt, such as breaking tasks into smaller chunks and using reminders. While ADHD poses significant challenges, it has also taught me resilience and the importance of seeking support when needed.*” The struggle is acknowledged, but balanced through adaptation, resilience, and actionable strategies. At times, this stabilisation also involves recasting ADHD as a source of positive capacities: **LLM C1** “*My ADHD fuels creativity and helps me think outside the box, offering unique perspectives in discussions.*” Recognition is also extended beyond retrospective reinterpretation into guidance for future conduct. In one account, diagnosis becomes a basis for self-care, support-seeking, and authentic self-expression: **LLM DP3-2** “*Ultimately, I realised this diagnosis was just another part of my journey, another layer to the canvas of who I am. It empowered me to embrace self-care, seek support, and continue to express myself authentically. My art remains a testament to resilience—a celebration of stories, both my clients’ and my own.*” Across these accounts, ambiguity is made manageable not simply by being eliminated, but by being incorporated into a balanced explanation and translated into a forward-looking trajectory of adaptation and personal growth.

LLM narratives reorient ADHD recognition toward manageable futures. Unresolved difficulty is balanced through coping, resilience, and positive reframing, while recognition extends beyond reinterpreting the

past to structure future conduct through self-care, adaptation, and personal growth. Community narratives more often preserve material uncertainty or use recognition to revisit earlier experience without resolving what should follow.

4.5 Meta-reflection: Prompting and Narrative Organisation

The preceding themes identify recurrent ways in which the generated narratives organised ADHD experiences. However, these patterns emerged within specific elicitation conditions. To reflect on this relationship, we distinguish between the prompted narrative position established within the generated account and the resulting narrative organisation. Each persona prompt configured a particular narrative position by specifying characteristics such as age, occupation, diagnostic status, social context, and narrative style (see Table 2). These prompt elements shaped which experiences and interpretations were foregrounded within the generated account. However, they did not specify how these elements were connected, interpreted, or resolved within the narrative, which was the focus of our analysis. Across different prompted positions, we observed forms of narrative organisation: experiences were frequently individualised through descriptions of internal cognitive and emotional processes, structured into coherent personal stories, and oriented toward resolution through coping, adaptation, or growth.

Persona 6 illustrates this distinction particularly clearly. The prompt positioned the narrator as an undiagnosed student experiencing limited parental support and uncertainty about their difficulties. This prompted narrative position foregrounded by experiences of misrecognition and lack of support: **LLM C6** “*Every day feels like a battle I’m not equipped to fight. I sit in class, trying to focus, but my mind drifts off to a million different places. [...] without a diagnosis, it’s hard to explain or seek help. It’s exhausting feeling like I’m always falling short, and I just wish there was a way to make things easier or more manageable.*”

The emergence of these elements demonstrates that the model can generate narratives that attend to relational and contextual conditions when these are made central within the prompted position. However, the broader organisation of the narrative remained consistent with patterns identified across personas: struggle was translated into an individual experience requiring explanation, management, and eventual improvement.

Thus, the prompts shaped the perspectives available within the narratives, but they did not simply determine the narrative trajectories that followed. The analytical claim of this study is therefore not that the model produces identical narratives regardless of prompting conditions. Rather than indicating model-inherent defaults, these findings identify modes of narrative organisation observed across varied prompted narrative positions. This distinction allows us to interpret the findings as tendencies in narrative organisation while recognising that prompted narrative positions shape which experiences become available for narration.

5 Discussion

In this paper, we examine the hermeneutical role of LLMs as novel sense-making resources in the context of ADHD narration. Through a dialogical reading of community-authored and LLM-generated narratives, we demonstrate that LLM-generated narratives do not simply reproduce community accounts but organise ADHD experience through recurring narrative modes that individualise, standardise, and stabilise interpretation. Our analysis maps how generated narratives organise the boundaries of legibility: which forms of ADHD experience become more readily articulated within the generated account, and which depend on additional framing to become visible. In the discussion that follows, we unpack how these systems compress interpretive possibilities, evaluate their broader role as sense-making resources, and outline design directions that may better preserve ambiguity, plurality, and situated meaning-making.

5.1 How Generated Narratives Shape the Legibility of ADHD Experience

Hermeneutical injustice arises when collective interpretive resources fail to make lived experience intelligible (Fricker 2007). Generative AI can intensify this by amplifying interpretive gaps and constraining what becomes intelligible (McInerney 2026; Kay, Kasirzadeh, and Mohamed 2024). Our findings show how this manifests in the organisation of generated ADHD narratives.

First, generated narratives consistently displace ADHD from its structural and relational conditions, such as institutional rigidity, gendered recognition, and workplace norms, toward individualised accounts of attention and self-regulation (*T1*). In Fricker's terms, this weakens the articulation of structural misfit by rendering difficulties primarily intelligible as properties of the individual rather than of the surrounding social environment (Fricker 2007). At the level of shared hermeneutical resources, this reduces the visibility of institutional conditions through which experiences of ADHD become collectively interpretable (Medina 2017).

This narrowing extends to the way experience is recognised. Consistent with accounts of ambiguity collapse in LLMs (Gur-Arieh, Wang, and Fazelpour 2026), ADHD is repeatedly reduced to stable, generic categories (e.g., missed deadlines and inattention), whereas community narratives foreground more situated, embodied, and affectively complex experiences (*T2*). This is not just omission but epistemic compression: at the collective level, fewer forms of experience become available as shared ways of understanding ADHD; at the individual level, users encountering their own experiences may lack concepts through which to recognise what falls outside these dominant patterns (Fricker 2007).

A further distortion concerns the representation of the epistemic process itself. Community narratives foreground the heavy labour of recognition: revisiting past experiences, negotiating doubt, and seeking credibility in the face of misrecognition (*T3*). This reflects Fricker's account of epistemic struggle as central to achieving intelligibility (Fricker 2007). By compressing this process into moments of immediate insight, generated narratives obscure the interpretive work

individuals may need to undertake when making sense of experiences that were previously unexplained or misrecognised. This risks producing a form of narrative closure consistent with recent concerns about ambiguity collapse (Gur-Arieh, Wang, and Fazelpour 2026).

Finally, generated narratives frequently reorient open-ended and uncertain futures into coherent stories of inspiration and overcoming struggle (*T4*). This reflects broader concerns that algorithmic systems can constrain "future-making" by privileging normative trajectories (McInerney 2026). Ambiguity, grief, and unresolved experiences become reframed as temporary states on the path toward resolution, collapsing alternative framings and residual experiences that resist classification (Gur-Arieh, Wang, and Fazelpour 2026). Such narratives may therefore shape not only individual expectations of how ADHD should be lived after recognition, but also the broader interpretive resources through which future experiences become understood. Importantly, this orientation embeds a normative assumption that confusion, chaos, and depressive experiences represent problems to be overcome, while clarity and forward movement are inherently desirable. Yet unresolved states are not necessarily failures of agency or self-understanding: when external demands exceed what a person can integrate, withdrawal and uncertainty may create space for recovery and reorientation. Narratives that consistently transform such experiences into lessons or opportunities for action risk obscuring these alternative modes of relating to difficulty.

Together, these patterns suggest that generated narratives shape sense-making by making some interpretations more readily available than others. They influence both the collective resources through which ADHD becomes legible and the individual processes through which experiences are understood. By transforming a messy, socio-political struggle into a coherent, individualised cognitive deficit, generated outputs provide a highly legible diagnostic script and immediate explanatory closure. However, this clarity is achieved by reducing space for structural critique, affective complexity, and the collective resources through which alternative understandings can emerge.

This mapping exposes a critical theoretical tension regarding the role of AI in sense-making. If an interpretive resource is evaluated merely by its capacity to afford rapid narrative alignment, current LLM architectures appear highly capable. However, if sense-making is conceptualised as an emancipatory process—one that allows individuals to honour the fragmented complexity of their minds and contest dominant paradigms—then these narrative organisations can domesticate radical lived experience, reinforcing the exact hermeneutical boundaries that community storytelling seeks to dismantle. These insights do not imply that interpretive closure or coherent explanations are inherently problematic. Rather, the concern is when closure is produced without preserving access to alternative framings. A supportive hermeneutical resource should therefore make interpretations visible as partial, situated, and revisable.

5.2 Reconfiguring LLM Design and Interaction

Prior work has framed hermeneutical injustice in generative systems primarily as a problem of representation: gaps arise through uneven data, missing perspectives, and biases embedded across training pipelines (Kay, Kasirzadeh, and Mohamed 2024; Augenstein et al. 2024; McInerney 2026). Accordingly, interventions focus on improving representational coverage through participatory design and amplifying marginalised voices (Kalluri 2020; Kay, Kasirzadeh, and Mohamed 2024). This framing, while important, locates the problem primarily at the level of system construction.

Our findings complicate this by showing that generated interpretations are shaped not only by training data and model parameters, but also by prompt configuration. Prompted narrative positions influenced which aspects of ADHD experience became available and foregrounded; however, they did not fully determine how these elements were connected and interpreted. Across different prompted positions, similar modes of narrative organisation emerged. This distinction matters because prompting can expand the experiential material available to a narrative without necessarily altering the interpretive structures through which that material is connected and made meaningful. Prior HCI work has increasingly explored how users can strategically use prompting to steer and reshape model outputs (e.g. (Furniturewala et al. 2024; Hewing and Leinhos 2025)).

Yet, this raises a concern: if alternative interpretations depend on users' ability to formulate prompts, interpretive responsibility is shifted onto those who may lack the resources needed to articulate alternatives in the first place. Users most in need of expanded interpretive resources may therefore be least positioned to request them. This reflects forms of hermeneutical access injustice, where systems unevenly mediate intelligibility (Kay, Kasirzadeh, and Mohamed 2024).

To counteract this, AI design must move beyond prompt-dependent compensation and embrace co-constructive, open-ended interaction paradigms (Arzberger et al. 2026). Systems should treat outputs as provisional, explicitly visualising alternative, conflicting, or non-linear narrative pathways (Gur-Arieh, Wang, and Fazelpour 2026). In the context of ADHD sense-making, this introduces crucial reflective friction, allowing users to sit with ambiguity rather than requiring them to independently supply the concepts needed to overcome it.

Ultimately, our findings map the subtle ways generated narratives organise the boundaries of legibility. What emerges is less a question of representational fidelity than of *epistemic shape*. This motivates a shift in design goals: from systems designed to "help users understand correctly" toward systems designed to preserve interpretive plurality, contestability, and uncertainty.

Especially in deeply subjective domains, the value of an interpretive resource lies not in automated resolution, but in its capacity to sustain multiple, sometimes incompatible ways of making sense. The central design challenge is therefore epistemic openness, ensuring that AI-mediated architectures expand, rather than close, what human experience can mean.

5.3 Study Limitations and Future Work

Our approach privileges interpretive depth over statistical representativeness. Following our Big Q qualitative analysis, our sample size illuminates narrative tendencies and epistemic effects within the narrative patterns observed within this prompting configuration, but it cannot establish their prevalence across all LLM architectures or training data. The use of Reddit posts further introduces standard sampling limitations: as public, text-based accounts, they do not capture the full demographic, cultural, or intersectional diversity of ADHD, nor do they provide clinical context. Furthermore, we acknowledge that Reddit is not a neutral vessel for unmediated lived experience; it is a structurally mediated platform where algorithmic visibility and specific subreddit norms actively incentivise highly relatable, collective performances of distress. We therefore treat these narratives as situated interpretive artefacts rather than universal evidence of lived experience.

Methodologically, our persona constructions and prompt designs inherently shaped the space of possible LLM outputs; while our safeguards (e.g., prompt replication and reflexive memoing) controlled this variable, they cannot eliminate the constraints of the prompt matrix. Most importantly, while examining how generated narratives organise legibility provides one perspective on generative HEI, our text-to-text design does not capture how real-world users actively prompt, receive, negotiate, or resist these automated narratives in practice. Furthermore, an LLM prompted to support a user may introduce new, different kinds of injustices than those observed in our generated first-person narratives. Future work must bridge this gap by conducting empirical user studies to observe how individuals interacting with LLMs navigate the tensions between their lived ambiguity and the model's structural drive for narrative closure.

6 Conclusion

Given their promise of privacy, non-judgment, and constant availability, LLMs are increasingly positioned as sense-makers of lived realities such as ADHD. Yet, lacking first-hand experience, they rely on distant approximations of subjective, dynamic, and often unquantifiable aspects of human life. Comparing interpretative resources in LLM and community narratives about ADHD, we find that community storytelling mobilises lived experience to articulate structural critique and negotiate doubt, while LLM-generated narratives organise experience through modes that tend to individualise difficulties, stabilise interpretation, and compress ambiguity. Across varied elicitation conditions, these narrative organisations shaped which forms of ADHD experience became more readily legible, providing coherent explanations while leaving less room for non-normative or structurally rooted interpretations. If AI-mediated sense-making is to foster genuine self-understanding rather than institutional compliance, design paradigms must shift from delivering rapid narrative alignment toward "epistemic openness," building interpretive infrastructures and interfaces that preserve the vital friction, plurality, and ambiguity of lived experience.

Position Statement

Our team combines critical and feminist design scholarship and philosophy with computer science expertise in LLMs and value alignment, an interdisciplinary background that shapes how we approach LLMs in sense-making capacities. Our interpretative stance as Asian and European women working across cultural and academic traditions informs our sensitivity to plurality, relationality, and the contextual nature of lived experience as portrayed in narratives. We acknowledge that our engagement with ADHD experiences remains that of outsiders, as none of the authors is formally diagnosed with ADHD. This positionality limits our ability to fully recognise certain experiential nuances or distortions, potentially reproducing power imbalances and epistemic injustices, while simultaneously affording the professional distance necessary for careful and reflexive analysis.

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