

The Structural-Constructivist Taxonomy of Affect: Implementing the Core Emotion Framework and 7-Step Detangling Protocol across Diagnostic Architectures

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Abstract

The landscape of modern affective science is undergoing a significant transition from categorical models of emotion toward structural-constructivist frameworks that prioritize the functional mechanics of the human operating system. At the forefront of this shift is the Core Emotion Framework (CEF), an integrative model developed by Jamel Bulgaria that reframes subjective experience not as a collection of fixed biological categories or culturally assembled narratives, but as the output of ten discrete functional operators organized within a $3 \times 3 + 1$ architectural system. This paradigm shifts the focus from the content of an emotion—such as the narrative reasons for feeling sad—to the structure of the affective response. In this model, psychopathology is redefined as a loss of Operator Agility, characterized by the technical failure of operator cycles and the emergence of fusion, where operators become pathologically coupled, leading to cognitive rigidity and a suppression of individual agency.

Theoretical Foundations and the Decalogue of Operators

**) We welcome feedback on the preregistration and study design, and invite researchers who are interested in peer-reviewing the system (or any CEF document of their choice) to contact us.*

The architecture of the CEF is built upon the Decalogue of Operators, ten universal functional movements that serve as the building blocks of all human experience. These operators are distributed across three primary centers of intelligence: the Head (Cognitive), the Heart (Relational), and the Gut (Motoric), with a tenth operator, Accepting, serving as a central stabilizing hub.¹ The health of the system is measured by the ability to modulate these operators independently on a 0-10 scale, where $A(O)$ represents the activation level of a specific operator.¹ Each operator possesses a unique functional signature and is associated with a specific somatic anchor, providing a physical reference point for both practitioners and clients during the detangling process.¹

Functional Identity and Somatic Resonance Table

The following table serves as the technical specification for the ten operators within the CEF, mapping their functional identities to their somatic anchors and primary utilities within the human operating system.

Center	Operator	Functional Identity	Somatic Anchor	Primary Utility
Head	Sensing	Pure perception and signal detection	Forehead / Eyes	Intake layer of the cognitive engine ¹
Head	Calculating	Analysis, evaluation, and categorization	Forehead / Temples	Rules-based processing and rule generation ¹
Head	Deciding	Commitment to a path or conclusion	Forehead / Crown	Resolution of analysis into action ¹
Heart	Expanding	Opening emotional space and vulnerability	Chest / Sternum	Increasing relational aperture and trust ¹
Heart	Constricting	Closing aperture and establishing	Chest / Ribcage	Precision and establishing safety

		protection		conditions ¹
Heart	Achieving	Fulfillment and coordination of demands	Chest / Shoulders	The vector operator; moves the system forward ¹
Gut	Arranging	Organizing internal and external order	Hips / Lower Belly	Infrastructure compiler of the operating system ¹
Gut	Appreciating	Valuing presence and qualitative depth	Hips / Pelvis	Evaluation of dignity and depth ¹
Gut	Boosting	Amplifying energy and momentum	Hips / Sacrum	Surge engine; turns inertia into velocity ¹
Hub	Accepting	Integration and baseline recalibration	Whole Body / Ground	Metabolizer; turns gains into steady-state ¹

The structural health of an individual is contingent upon the independence of these activation values.

When $A(O_1)$ and $A(O_2)$ become coupled, the system loses its ability to respond to environmental demands with precision. This coupling is the mathematical definition of fusion, which leads to architectural knots that the 7-Step Protocol is designed to untie.¹ For example, a fusion of Calculating and Constricting ensures that any attempt at problem-solving involuntarily triggers a protective shutdown, resulting in cognitive paralysis and emotional distress.¹

Detailed Exposition of the 7-Step Detangling Protocol

The Detangling Protocol (Protocol 3) is a canonical sequence utilized to restore center clarity and dissolve fusion-driven overflow.¹ It is situated within a broader suite of Phase 2 interventions designed for Structural Disassembly.¹ Each step must be followed with technical precision to ensure that disassembly does not lead to system instability or emotional flooding.¹

Step 1: Systematic Stabilization and Temporal Deceleration

The primary objective of the first step is the prevention of emotional flooding during the disassembly process. When a system is in high-intensity fusion, isolating operators can trigger overflow, where activation breaches center capacity and propagates uncontrollably.¹ The practitioner initiates somatic grounding, often involving guided meditation and a slow exhale breathing pattern to lower the internal temporal rate—the speed at which the client perceives and reacts to internal signals.¹ During this phase, the practitioner utilizes the 10→0 quieting sequence to reduce over-activated operators until they fall within a manageable range, typically $A(O) < 3$.¹ This reduction allows for the cognitive and somatic space required for diagnostic isolation.¹

Step 2: Diagnostic Isolation and Semantic Disambiguation

Once stabilized, the protocol moves to identify specific architectural knots using semantic disambiguation, helping the client distinguish between movements mislabeled as a single emotion.¹ Practitioner inquiries utilize Structural Questioning: "Is the movement narrowing your internal space or widening it?" or "Is this a movement of analysis or organization?"¹ These questions map activation to specific operators, such as Constricting vs. Expanding or Calculating vs. Arranging.¹ Once identified, the practitioner guides the client to anchor each operator in its home center, such as feeling Calculating in the forehead and Expanding in the chest.¹ This spatial separation is the first step in breaking the functional bond between them.¹

Step 3: Granular Differentiation and Facet Clarity

Each operator is composed of various facets or sub-components. In chronic fusions, these facets blend together or activate in an order that violates structural rules.¹ Step 3 involves identifying all active facets within a single operator, such as the Momentum and Drive facets of Boosting.¹ The protocol re-establishes the canonical ordering of these facets, which is critical because many fusions are maintained by attempting to activate late-stage facets before early-stage facets have stabilized.¹ Clarifying these internal edges reduces the likelihood of instant re-fusion.¹

Step 4: Mechanics of De-Fusion and Driver Modulation

Step 4 represents the functional core of the protocol, where the co-activation pattern is actively dissolved.¹ This requires identifying the driver operator—the one exerting the most influence or holding the highest activation in the fused pair.¹ The client is guided to reduce the modulation of the driver specifically while maintaining the passenger operator at its current level.¹ The goal is Independence Verification, where the client can activate the passenger operator without the driver automatically firing.¹

Step 5: Holarchical Rebalancing and Center Equilibrium

After detangling individual operators, practitioners address imbalances at the center level (Head, Heart, and Gut). Chronic fusions often lead to Center Dominance, where one center is over-weighted while

another is suppressed.¹ This is frequently observed in the GoodPerson Anxiety Pattern (GPAP), where the Head center over-performs to compensate for a suppressed Gut center.¹ The protocol involves restoring the functional capacity of the Heart and Gut centers so the Head no longer has to over-perform.¹

Step 6: Restoring Canonical Directionality and Transition Mastery

Step 6 focuses on Transition Mastery—the ability to move from one operator to its canonical successor without distortion.¹ Emotional health is defined by movement, and each center has a lawful direction, such as Sensing → Calculating → Deciding.¹ The practitioner guides the client through Movement Drills, activating and quieting operators in sequence to train Emotional Agility.¹ This process identifies six types of transition distortions: blocked, forced, skipped, reversed, cross-center drift, and oscillation.¹

Step 7: Completion and Modulation Reciprocity

The final step stabilizes the new configuration. The practitioner looks for a Completion Signal—a clear somatic indicator like a shift in breathing or a release of muscular tension in the hips.¹ The client verifies Modulation Reciprocity, ensuring they can now modulate previously fused operators independently, such as Deciding without triggering Constricting.¹ This restores Agency, where the client utilizes emotional operators as tools rather than being overwhelmed by them as reflexive forces.¹

Transdiagnostic Application to DSM Diagnoses

By reframing traditional diagnoses through the lens of operator fusion and suppression, the Detangling Protocol can be hypothetically applied to reconstruct the underlying engine of various disorders.¹

Avoidant Personality Disorder and GPAP

Avoidant Personality Disorder (AvPD) is modeled through the GoodPerson Anxiety Pattern (GPAP), which identifies a three-cluster structural configuration involving fusion and suppression.¹

Cluster	Component	Mechanistic Description	Resulting Affective Tone
Cluster 1	Compliance Fusion	Over-activation of approval-seeking and perfectionistic primers	Conscientious Anxiety; the need to be "good" to be safe ¹

Cluster 2	Agency Suppression	Under-activation of assertiveness and self-direction operators	Passivity and fear of expressing needs ¹
Cluster 3	Protest Signals	Rumination and somatic tension	Internal alarms signaling the structural collapse of agency ¹

The Detangling Protocol deconstructs this monolithic anxiety into constitutive architectural failures, focusing on restoring Gut-center operators (Boosting and Arranging).¹

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)

Major Depressive Disorder is increasingly understood as a multifactorial disorder involving interacting neural and metabolic processes.³ From a CEF perspective, MDD is characterized by a "Vector Collapse," where the Achieving operator (Heart) and Boosting operator (Gut) are significantly suppressed or fail to transition from the Sensing-Calculating phases of the Head center.¹ Research suggests that MDD involves altered organization of functional brain networks, which the CEF identifies as a failure of operator agility.⁴

The following table summarizes the CEF mapping of MDD symptoms:

DSM Symptom	CEF Operator Failure	Mechanistic Description
Anhedonia	Achieving (Heart) Collapse	Inability to transition into fulfillment or coordinate demands ¹
Psychomotor Retardation	Boosting (Gut) Suppression	Failure of the surge engine to turn inertia into velocity ¹
Rumination	Calculating (Head) Loop	Technical over-activation of analysis without transition to Deciding ¹
Feelings of Worthlessness	Appreciating (Gut) Distortion	Failure to value qualitative depth and individual dignity ¹

Structural Rebalancing for MDD utilizes the 7-Step Protocol to de-fuse the Calculating operator from the Constricting response, while simultaneously using activation sequences to restore the Achieving vector.¹

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is associated with a loss of top-down inhibition over limbic regions, leading to exaggerated emotional reactivity.⁹ In CEF terms, PTSD is an "Edge Condition" where the Constricting operator is pathologically fused with the Sensing operator in the Head center.¹ This causes every sensory input (Sensing) to trigger a protective shutdown or hyperarousal (Constricting), bypassing the stabilizing hub of Accepting.¹

The application of the Detangling Protocol focuses on Step 4 (De-Fusion), specifically decoupling *A(Sensing)* from *A(Constricting)*. By establishing "Independence Verification," the client learns to perceive environmental signals without an automatic somatic closure.¹ Research into Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) indicates that targeting experiential avoidance (a form of Sensing-Constricting fusion) notably reduces PTSD symptoms, with some interventions showing a 46% decrease in symptom scores.¹¹

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD is characterized by a functional connection between obsessions (distress) and compulsions (relief).¹² In the CEF, this is viewed as a "Rules-Based Overdrive" where the Calculating operator in the Head center becomes hyper-activated, producing a constant stream of rule-generation that the system cannot resolve into a Deciding action.¹ This leads to a state of "Cognitive Looping," where the transition Sensing → Calculating is functional, but the transition Calculating → Deciding is blocked.¹

Cognitive models of OCD identify thought-action fusion as a key belief domain.¹² The CEF maps this as a fusion between Calculating and Boosting, where the act of thinking a rule automatically triggers the energy of action.¹ The 7-Step Protocol addresses this by restoring "Canonical Directionality" in Step 6, training the system to complete the cycle into Deciding or return to the Accepting baseline.¹

The Open Validation Roadmap and Empirical Benchmarks

The Core Emotion Framework is presented as a falsifiable working hypothesis intended to guide systematic research through an Open Validation Roadmap.¹ This roadmap utilizes a structured, multi-phase plan to establish empirical baselines for the framework's ten operators.¹

Integrating the Intima Dataset and OSF Pilot Study

The validation roadmap incorporates exploratory behavioral data and state-specific activation metrics to test the framework's structural claims.¹

Data Source	Metric / Finding	Implications for CEF
OSF Pilot Study (N=39)	Action–Opinion Divergence	Individuals can distinguish between reflexive and idealized responses, suggesting operator independence ¹
Intima Dataset (Zenodo)	Reproducibility of State-Specific Activation	Establishes benchmarks for the 10-dimensional activation vectors (A_0) ¹
Amano et al. (2026)	Short-term Test–Retest Reproducibility	Defines the boundary conditions for future measurement of stability metrics ¹
TS-4 Specifications	Computational Tractability	Uses JSON-LD knowledge graphs to model chronic fusion and detangling algorithms ¹

The pilot study results, while not yet interpreted as full operator validation, provide preliminary evidence that humans can observe the "seams" between their reflexive emotional actions and their cognitively preferred outcomes.¹ This supports the CEF premise that operators are functional tools that can be independently modulated rather than monolithic biological states.¹

Roadmap Phases and Future Directions

The Open Validation Program follows five distinct phases designed to ensure structural and semantic integrity.¹

1. **Conceptual Stability (Phase 1):** Establishing the authoritative set of ten operators.¹
2. **Boundary Condition Definition (Phase 2):** Utilizing Amano et al.'s (2026) reproducibility patterns to identify the limits of operator modulation across diverse populations.¹
3. **State-Specific Reproducibility (Phase 3):** Implementing the INTIMA benchmark to verify that specific operator configurations (e.g., GPAP) are reproducible across different research sites.¹
4. **Clinical Utility Testing (Phase 4):** Measuring the efficacy of the 7-Step Detangling Protocol in reducing symptom scores across the DSM spectrum, specifically focusing on MDD, PTSD, and OCD.¹

5. **Multi-Modal Expansion (Phase 5):** Integrating EEG and fMRI biomarkers with the 10-dimensional activation vectors to establish a unified neuro-computational model of affect.¹
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Institutional and Computational Implications

The Core Emotion Framework's utility extends beyond individual clinical psychopathology into the realms of institutional governance and AI engineering.¹ By modeling complex systems as functional operators, the CEF offers a structural-constructivist way to resolve bureaucratic or relational traps.¹

Multilateral Governance and Institutional Velocity

The application of the CEF to the United Nations (UN 2.0) illustrates the framework's systemic relevance.¹ Institutional failure is reframed as a structural failure of operators:

- **Sensing Without Deciding:** Earth-observation systems provide data (Sensing), but the resolution of that analysis into commitment (Deciding) is blocked, leading to institutional inertia.¹
- **Arranging and Boosting:** Innovation networks (Arranging) and fast-track response funds (Boosting) are utilized to turn institutional inertia into institutional velocity.¹ Architectural Resonance in governance involves aligning each institutional department to its proper operator role, ensuring that cognitive engines (Head) and motoric engines (Gut) work in synchrony.¹

Synthetic Affect and AI Systems

For AI development, the CEF provides a structured emotional lexicon (EL1) and activation vectors that allow for "machine-based synthetic affect".¹ Unlike traditional AI models that simulate emotions based on text-sentiment labels, CEF-based AI utilizes JSON-LD knowledge graphs to process internal transformations.¹ This ensures that the AI's "affective state" is governed by the same scalar modulation equations as the human operating system, facilitating more authentic and reproducible human-AI interaction.²

Conclusion

The 7-Step Detangling Protocol represents the clinical application of the Core Emotion Framework, providing a technical method for resolving structural psychopathology.¹ By deconstructing the mystery of "feelings" into the mechanical reality of functional operators and centers, the framework restores agency, clarity, and agility to the human experience.¹ The hypothetical application of the protocol to diagnoses like Major Depressive Disorder, PTSD, and OCD reveals a transformative pathway for the future of affective science, moving away from symptom-based labeling toward mechanistic resolution.¹ While the empirical status of the Decalogue of Operators remains open, the integration of the Intima dataset, the OSF pilot study, and the Amano et al. (2026) reproducibility metrics establishes a rigorous,

falsifiable roadmap for validation.¹ By restoring "Operator Agility" and resolving the architectural knots of "fusion," the Detangling Protocol establishes a foundational tool for human flourishing in the face of complex structural psychopathology.¹

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