

Affective Structuralism and the Dual-Engine Model: Applied Core Emotion Framework in Marital Meta-Stability

Author: Xǔ Chénglǎn

Email: xuchenglan@zohomail.com

ORCID: [0009-0006-5903-4987](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5903-4987)

Abstract

The emergence of the Core Emotion Framework (CEF) in early 2026, authored by Jamel Bulgaria, represents a definitive paradigm shift in affective science, proposing what researchers term a structural-constructivist architecture to resolve the historical "100 years war" between discrete emotion models and dimensional frameworks.¹ While early documentation primarily addressed psychological optimization and clinical mechanistics in individual adults, the

framework's foundational principles—organized around a tripartite center system and ten universal operators—provide an unprecedented hypothetical model for the maintenance of marriage and parenting.¹ Within this framework, human relationships are recontextualized; they are viewed not as social contracts or emotional states, but as the structural calibration, modulation, and meta-stability of unified structural engines working in concert.¹

中文摘要（基于文档内容）

本研究以核心情绪框架（Core Emotion Framework, CEF）为基础，提出一种将婚姻理解为“双引擎系统”的结构—建构式模型。文中指出，CEF 通过三大中心与十个普遍操作符，为情绪提供“结构建构式架构”，以解决离散情绪模型与维度模型之间长达百年的理论分裂（文中引用：“CEF...提出一种结构建构式架构，以解决历史性的‘百年战争’”）。在此框架下，婚姻不再被视为情绪状态或社会契约，而是两个“统一结构引擎”之间的结构耦合、调节与共同维稳。

文章进一步提出“婚姻即双引擎系统”的假设，认为伴侣之间的互动由十个操作符的互触与互调所构成，目标是实现“元稳定性”，即在长期时间尺度上维持结构完整性与功能卓越（文中写道：“两套心理架构通过迭代式共同调节而耦合，其目标是元稳定性”）。研究详细分析了三大中心在婚姻中的功能：头中心负责“认知同步”，心中心负责“关系流动性”，肠中心负责“动机共振”。每个操作符（如 O4 扩展、O5 收缩、O7 安排、O10 接纳）在婚姻中的角色均被技术化地重新定义。

文中还提出“5:1 比率原则”“共享居中”“解缠协议”等结构化方法，用以解释并修复婚姻中的结构性失调，如融合、共享融合、溢出与结构破裂。冲突被重新解释为“情绪架构的调节失败”，而非性格缺陷。通过 0-10 调节、方向性恢复与操作符序列化，伴侣可从反应式互动转向主动的结构优化。

研究最终指出，婚姻的繁荣来自十个操作符的独立与和谐运作，使伴侣能够以“动态稳定性”共同面对复杂性。文中总结：“婚姻在结构对齐时，代表了人类共同调节的最高表达——一个能够维持亲密、清晰与价值共鸣的元稳定引擎。”

The Resolution of the Affective Schism

For over a century, the study of human emotion remained bifurcated. Discrete models, such as those proposed by Izard, argued for biologically hardwired, universal emotional categories, while dimensional models prioritized a continuous spectrum of valence and arousal.² The Core Emotion Framework resolves this dichotomy by treating traditional emotional labels as secondary expressions of ten core operational processes.¹ This shift from semantic meaning to operational mechanics allows for a precise, repeatable structural foundation for understanding and regulating human experience.¹

In the context of marriage, this resolution is critical. Traditional counseling often falters because it relies on the subjective interpretation of labels like "anger," "sadness," or "neglect," which can vary wildly between partners.¹ The CEF replaces these ambiguous terms with a technical language focused on the activation of specific operators within the Head, Heart, and Gut centers.¹ A conflict is no longer described as an "argument about money" but as a "structural rupture" where one partner's Arranging operator (O7) triggers the other's Constricting operator (O5) in a maladaptive feedback loop.¹

The Dual-Engine System: Marriage as Structural Coupling

The CEF hypothesizes marriage as a dual-engine system characterized by structural coupling.¹ In this model, two distinct psychological architectures are linked through iterative coregulation, where the operators of one partner continuously trigger and modulate the operators of the other.¹ The objective of this system is meta-stability—the ability to maintain structural integrity and functional excellence across long time horizons.¹

The Tripartite Alignment in Partnership

For a marriage to achieve meta-stability, both partners must align their functional centers: the Head, the Heart, and the Gut.¹ This alignment is the prerequisite for shared clarity, relational fluidity, and motivational resonance.¹

Center	Marriage Application	Primary Marital Goal	Functional Mechanics
Head	Cognitive Synchronization	Shared clarity and strategic decision-making.	Sensing (Shared awareness), Calculating (Joint planning), Deciding (Committed choices).
Heart	Relational Fluidity	Maintaining intimacy while respecting autonomy.	Expanding (Intimacy), Constricting (Boundaries), Achieving (Executing life goals).
Gut	Motivational Resonance	Shared action, proactive support, and value.	Arranging (Leadership), Appreciating (Validation), Boosting (Momentum), Accepting (Serenity).

The Ten Universal Operators: Technical Specifications and Marital Roles

The Core Emotion Framework identifies ten universal operators, or primal powers, that govern how individuals interact with their internal and external worlds.² In the CEF architecture, an operator is formally defined as a mapping of a center–process pair to a scalar activation value:

$$O(c, p) \rightarrow \sigma$$

where c represents the center (Head, Heart, or Gut), p the process, and σ the scalar value from 0 to 10.¹ In marriage, the successful activation and modulation of these ten powers are what determine the relationship's capability to withstand complexity.¹

The Head Center (Sensing, Calculating, Deciding)

The Head Center focuses on cognitive and executive functions, providing the "perceptual clarity" necessary for a relationship to navigate reality.¹

01: Sensing

Sensing is the operator of raw perception and awareness without interpretation.³ In a marriage, 01 is responsible for maintaining a "safe base" by regulating stress levels so that both partners remain calm and alert enough for connection.¹ Its somatic signature involves a widening behind the eyes and a sense of lightness in the forehead, moving upward and outward.³ When partners fail to activate Sensing, they lose touch with each other's non-verbal cues, leading to a state of disconnect.⁵

02: Calculating

Calculating involves analysis, evaluation, and the reduction of ambiguity through structural refinement.³ In a marital context, this operator powers joint planning and risk evaluation.¹ Its somatic signature is a narrowing behind the eyes and forward tension in the forehead, moving forward and inward.³ Problems arise when 02 becomes over-active or dominant, leading to a relationship that feels clinical and devoid of emotional warmth.⁵

03: Deciding

Deciding facilitates the selection of alternatives and the commitment to action.⁵ This operator builds mutual trust in the relationship's direction.¹ When 03 is functioning properly, couples can make "committed choices" together, providing a stable trajectory for their shared life.¹

The Heart Center (Expanding, Constricting, Achieving)

The Heart Center focuses on relational and affective flow, balancing the need for connection with the necessity of boundaries.¹

04: Expanding

Expanding is the power of intimacy, empathy, and connection.⁵ It is fostered during "states of shared joy" and profound vulnerability.¹ Somatically, it involves an opening of the chest space and a softening of the facial muscles.⁵ In the dual-engine model, 04 is the primary mechanism for deepening the emotional bond.¹

05: Constricting

Often referred to as the "power of 'No'," Constricting is essential for setting boundaries and maintaining individual autonomy.¹ It prevents emotional overwhelm within the partnership.¹ While it is a "protective" interaction, it is vital for long-term health; without 05, one partner may become "fused" with or consumed by the other.¹

06: Achieving

Achieving helps a couple balance various life roles—such as being spouses, parents, and professionals—while maintaining excellence.¹ It provides the "Relational Fluidity" required to execute life goals together without sacrificing the quality of the connection.¹

The Gut Center (Arranging, Appreciating, Boosting, Accepting)

The Gut Center is the seat of action, embodiment, and motivational processes, providing the "groundedness" of the relationship.¹

07: Arranging

Arranging powers proactive behavior, leadership, and the mobilization of resources.¹ In marriage, it facilitates proactive leadership and the exchange of signals regarding needs and desires.¹

08: Appreciating

Appreciating functions as "internal applause," providing mutual validation and reinforcing the value of the partner.¹ It is a key driver of "Motivational Resonance," ensuring that both partners feel seen and respected for their contributions to the union.¹

09: Boosting

Boosting sustains momentum through obstacles, providing the energy needed to overcome shared challenges.¹ Somatically, it is felt as a small upward activation in the breath and posture.⁵ In marriage, 09 prevents the system from stalling during times of external stress.¹

010: Accepting

Accepting allows the couple to "yield to reality" when a situation cannot be changed.¹ It promotes shared serenity and prevents the chronic frustration that arises from resisting unchangeable circumstances.¹ Somatically, it involves a downward release of tension.⁵

Affective Dynamics and Coregulation Mechanics

In a meta-stable marriage, emotion regulation is not merely an individual task; it is bidirectional and coregulatory.¹ The CEF identifies several key dynamics that govern the health of the dual-engine system.

The 5:1 Ratio Principle

A healthy partnership is characterized by maintaining a 5:1 ratio: five positive operator interactions for every one negative or protective interaction.¹

- **Positive Interactions:** These include the activation of Expanding (04), Appreciating (08), or Sensing (01).¹
- **Protective Interactions:** These include Constricting (05) or Arranging (07) when used to set boundaries or demand change.¹

When this ratio is maintained, the relationship remains resilient to stress. When it fails, the couple may fall into a "Negative Emotion Cycle," where a perceived threat triggers a protective operator, which is then sensed as an attack by the other partner, leading to a "demand-withdraw" pattern.¹

Synchronization and Meta-Stability

As partners coregulate, they may experience synchronization, where their physiological states and operator activations become linked.¹ This synchronization is the foundation of meta-stability.¹ A synchronized couple can use their shared activation to amplify joy (Expanding) or to ground each other during crises (Accepting/Sensing).¹

Structural Psychopathology in Marriage

The CEF provides a technical language for marital conflict through the lens of structural psychopathology.¹ Conflict is viewed not as a personality flaw but as a failure of the emotional architecture to modulate correctly.¹

Fusion and Shared Fusion

Fusion is a state where the activation of one process inappropriately alters another.¹ In marriage, "Shared Fusion" occurs when both partners become trapped in a shared state of anxiety or distress.¹ For example, if a couple is facing a financial crisis, they may become fused in a state of Constricting (O5) and Calculating (O2).¹ In this state, they lose the cognitive flexibility to find creative solutions because their analytical engine is being driven by a protective, fearful focus.¹

Overflow and Structural Rupture

Overflow occurs when a center's capacity is exceeded, driving activation into another center.¹ A partner who is socially overwhelmed (Heart center) might experience an explosive reaction (Gut center), such as shouting (O7: Arranging/O9: Boosting).¹ If left unaddressed, repeated overflow leads to structural rupture—a deterioration in the emotional bond that prevents the system from "repairing" through standard operator transitions.¹

Demand-Withdraw as Operator Failure

The common demand–withdraw pattern in relationships is reinterpreted by the CEF as a specific operator failure.¹ This occurs when one partner’s Arranging drive (07), demanding change or engagement, triggers the other partner’s Accepting (010) or Constricting (05) operator in a maladaptive withdrawal.¹ In this state, the withdrawing partner is "yielding to reality" or setting a boundary not out of strength, but as a defensive measure to preserve the status quo against perceived attack.¹

The CEF Method: Optimization Protocols for Couples

To move from a state of structural rupture to capability optimization, the CEF Method offers specific protocols adapted for couples.¹ These protocols allow partners to consciously manage their dual-engine system.¹

Protocol 1: Shared Centering

Before engaging in high-stakes or sensitive conversations, couples are encouraged to establish "architectural clarity" through Shared Centering.¹ This protocol stabilizes the system, ensuring that both partners are operating from a balanced state.¹

Step	Functional Center	Action	Intended Outcome
1	Head	Widen awareness to include partner and environment.	Establishes Sensing (01) and reduces stress. ¹
2	Heart	Actively open the chest space and soften the face.	Prepares for Expanding (04) and connection. ¹

3	Gut	Ground the hips and release tension downward.	Establishes presence and stability. ¹
4	Check	Use 0–10 modulation to assess current activation.	Identifies potential fusion or overflow. ⁵

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The Detangling Protocol for Couples

The Detangling Protocol is a "structural disassembly" technique used when a conflict has become fused.¹ This protocol allows the couple to separate technical or logical disagreements from relational wounds.¹

- **Identification:** Recognizing that a disagreement (e.g., about the family schedule) is fused with a feeling of being unvalued (O8: Appreciating) or unloved (O4: Expanding).¹
- **Isolation:** The couple works to isolate the Calculating operator (O2) responsible for the schedule from the relational needs of the Heart and Gut centers.¹
- **Sequential Resolution:** By "detangling" the dials, the couple can resolve the logical planning (O2) without the interference of emotional reactivity, and then address the relational needs in a dedicated, safe space.¹

0–10 Modulation and the Stabilization Sequence

Partners in the CEF model learn to monitor each other's "dials"—the scalar activation values of their operators.¹ If one partner is "Boosting" (O9) at a level 10, indicating high stress or emotional intensity, the other partner may utilize a Stabilization Sequence.¹ This involves intentionally quieting their own operators to a level 0, providing a "safe base" or a neutral ground that facilitates coregulation.¹ This de-escalates the system's intensity, allowing the stressed partner's engine to return to a stable state.¹

Practitioner Perspectives on Marital Rebalancing

In the Core Emotion Framework, the role of a practitioner is not that of a therapist in the traditional sense, but that of an "architectural stabilizer".⁵ Practitioners use the CEF to help couples identify and correct imbalances in their tripartite systems.⁵

Center Rebalancing: Dominant and Collapsed States

An imbalance occurs when a center is either dominant (exerting excessive influence) or collapsed (failing to provide its functional contribution).⁵

- **The Head Center:** A dominant Head may lead to "analysis paralysis" or a cold, overly logical partnership, while a collapsed Head results in a lack of perceptual clarity and poor decision-making.⁵
- **The Heart Center:** A dominant Heart can cause a relationship to be overwhelmed by emotional intensity and a lack of boundaries, while a collapsed Heart leads to emotional numbness and a lack of connection.⁵
- **The Gut Center:** A dominant Gut might manifest as impulsive action or aggression (Boosting/Arranging), while a collapsed Gut results in a loss of motivation and presence.⁵

Practitioners work with couples to restore "Directionality"—the canonical transitions between operators and centers—and to re-establish the appropriate cross-center influence.⁵ This often involves "Operator Activation Sequencing," such as moving from Sensing to Calculating to Deciding to restore a collapsed Head center, or Arranging to Boosting to Accepting to restore a collapsed Gut.⁵

The Limits of Protocol Application

It is crucial for both partners and practitioners to recognize the "Special Cases" where these structural protocols are inappropriate.⁵ The CEF Practitioner Manual cautions against the use of these tools in situations involving active trauma activation, severe dissociation, or acute psychiatric crises.⁵ In these instances, the "architectural stabilizer" must defer to clinical experts trained in trauma-informed therapy.⁵

Case Application: Parenting as Foundational Architecture

The CEF suggests that marriage is influenced by the foundational training of operators in childhood.¹ Parenting is viewed as a technical intervention to optimize a child's "Operator Space".¹

- **Head Mastery:** Fostered by providing a "safe base" (O1) and risk-evaluation drills (O2).¹
- **Heart Mastery:** Developed through shared joy (O4) and the setting of firm boundaries (O5).¹
- **Gut Mastery:** Modeled through internal applause (O8) and the ability to yield to reality (O10).¹

When these operators are properly calibrated in childhood, individuals enter marriage with a more robust and flexible structural engine.¹ For couples already in partnership, identifying which operators were under-developed in their youth can provide a roadmap for their "Iterative Coregulation" and mutual rebalancing.¹

Conclusion: The Integrated Relationship Engine

The Core Emotion Framework moves the understanding of marriage from a social or narrative-based model into a structural-constructivist paradigm.¹ By identifying ten primal operators across three functional centers, the CEF provides a technical foundation for marital meta-stability.¹ Flourishing, in this view, is a matter of structural optimization.¹

A marriage achieves excellence when its operators function independently and harmoniously, allowing the partnership to navigate complexity with dynamic stability and profound connection.¹ Through protocols like Shared Centering, Detangling, and 0–10 Modulation, couples move from being reactive to their emotional states to becoming proactive architects of their shared life.¹ The dual-engine system of marriage, when structurally aligned, represents the ultimate expression of human coregulation—a meta-stable engine capable of sustained intimacy, shared clarity, and mutual value.¹

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