# Ease: A Threshold Model of Evaluative Access Constraints

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## Contents



# Definition, predictions, falsifications

## 1. Canonical definition (scope standard)

Ease is defined here as a regime of experience characterized by:
(i) permissive rather than evaluatively constrained coordination,
(ii) failure of anticipatory evaluation to capture the system at the moment of entry, and
(iii) non-accumulation of the episode into meaning, progress, or durable motivational value."

Ease is treated here as a mechanistic state rather than merely as a descriptive affect label. The framework does not assume identity between ease and reward, relaxation, positive mood, flow, or mindfulness.

## 2. Structural asymmetry

The framework is asymmetric in emphasis: its primary aim is not to model the production of ease, but to characterize the mechanisms by which access may become structurally constrained. Monitoring is treated as a gating constraint on entry rather than as a continuously acting suppressor.

## 3. Non-assimilation clause (anti-rebranding)

Ease is not reducible to reward intensity, pleasure, positive affect, relaxation, or "feeling good." A state may be intense and positive while remaining incompatible with ease if anticipatory evaluative coupling remains intact.

## 4. Demonstration domain (class > instance)

A concrete demonstration domain is a **Non-Use task paradigm**, implemented here in **Unreal Tournament 1999 (UT99)**. The task family is defined abstractly, UT99 is one instantiation.

Non-Use microtasks are short behavioral tasks designed to prevent anticipatory evaluation from stabilizing. They minimize:

explicit metrics,stable goals, progress cues, self-evaluation prompts, repeatable "technique" framing.

## 5. Falsification criteria (F1–F5)

- For unambiguous reference, falsification criteria are labeled F1–F5.
- **Table 2. Falsification criteria for the Ease framework (F1–F5).**

| Label | Falsification criterion (if robustly observed, the framework is false) |
|---|---|
| F1 | A direct, repeatable intervention (stimulation, molecule, technique) produces durable ease-compatible access without increasing anticipatory evaluative coupling over time. |
| F2 | Ease-compatible episodes reliably co-occur with stable, sustained evaluative monitoring, i.e., ease persists as a controlled, instrumentable state. |
| F3 | Repetition produces monotonic strengthening of access without methodification effects (no non-monotonicity across sessions). |
| F4 | Entry is not preferentially sensitive to evaluative probes (self-checks, rating prompts) relative to matched non-evaluative interruptions. |
| F5 | Z proxies fail to predict access constraints (entry probability and time-to-threshold) while strongly predicting persistence once ease is established. |

## 6. Canonical prediction index (A1–D1)

- For attribution and unambiguous reference, predictions are labeled A1–D1 and should be cited by label.
- **Table 1. Canonical prediction index (A1–D1).**

| Label | Prediction (minimal wording) | Primary dependent variable(s) |
|---|---|---|
| A1 | Metric removal increases entry probability. | Entry probability |
| A2 | Evaluative probes collapse entry more than matched non-evaluative interruptions. | Entry probability, time-to-threshold |
| A3 | Weak reward scaling under matched monitoring load. | Entry probability, persistence |
| B1 | The disruptive effect of evaluation declines with time since onset. | Probe collapse probability vs time |
| B2 | Prevention vs termination asymmetry (entry is easier to block than to terminate). | Entry probability vs termination rate |
| B3 | Persistence dissociation (fatigue dominates post-threshold). | Persistence duration, fatigue proxies |
| C1 | Non-monotonic repetition curve (rise then decline). | Entry probability across sessions |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| C2 | Attribution penalty (explanatory capture reduces future entry). | Entry probability in later sessions |
| C3 | Structural variation restores access more than exact repetition. | Entry probability after variation |
| D1 | Z predicts entry more than persistence. | Entry probability, time-to-threshold |

## 7. Canonical prediction map (Figure 1)

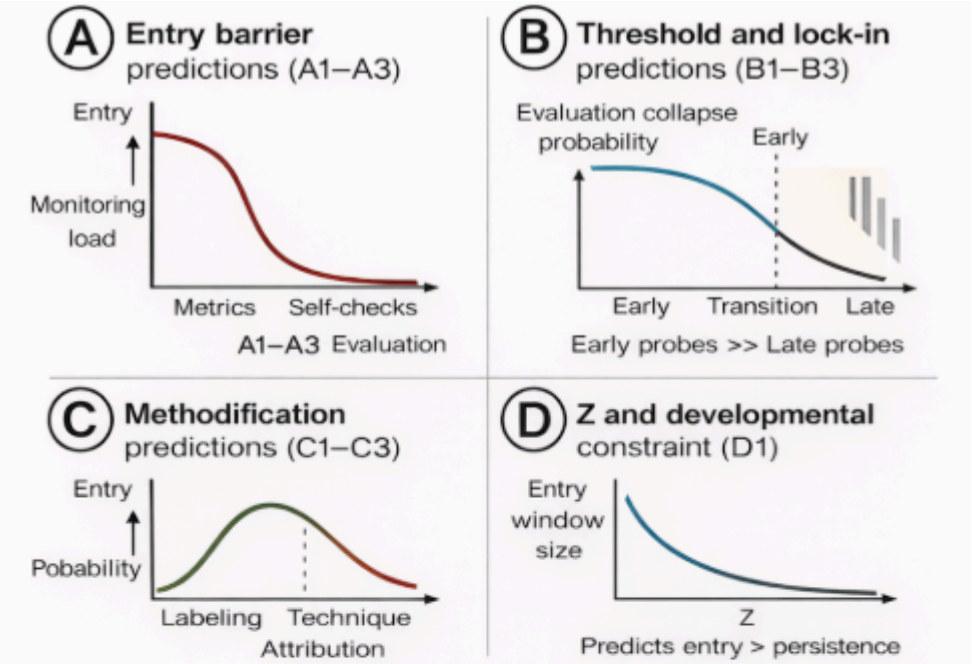


**Figure 1.** Canonical prediction map (A–D). (A) Entry barrier predictions (A1–A3). Entry probability is a steep function of monitoring load, with evaluative affordances (metrics, score, self-checks) acting primarily as access constraints rather than continuous suppressors.

(B) **Threshold and lock-in predictions (B1–B3).** The disruptive effect of evaluative probes is time-dependent: monitoring is maximally destructive early and progressively weaker after a transition point, with termination increasingly governed by fatigue-like constraints.

(C) **Methodification predictions (C1–C3).** Entry probability is non-monotonic across repetition: early exposures can facilitate access, but repeated instrumentalization and attribution reduce subsequent entry probability.

(D) **Z and developmental constraint** (D1). Proxies for cumulative optimization load (Z) predict reduced entry probability and longer time-to-threshold, with weaker effects on post-threshold persistence duration.

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  (A) Entry barrier predictions (A1–A3). Entry probability decreases steeply with monitoring load, with evaluative affordances (metrics, score, self-checks) acting primarily as access constraints rather than continuous suppressors.
  (B) Threshold and lock-in predictions (B1–B3). The disruptive effect of evaluative probes is time-dependent: monitoring is maximally destructive early and progressively weaker after a transition point, with termination increasingly governed by fatigue-like constraints.
  (C) Methodification predictions (C1–C3). Entry probability is non-monotonic across repetition: early exposures can facilitate access, but repeated instrumentalization and attribution reduce subsequent entry probability.
  (D) Z and developmental constraint (D1). Proxies for cumulative optimization load (Z) predict reduced entry probability and longer time-to-threshold, with weaker effects on post-threshold persistence duration.

## 8. Minimal endpoints (reporting standard)

- Studies should report separately:
  (i) **Entry probability**,
  (ii) **Time-to-threshold**,
  (iii) **Post-threshold persistence**.
- This separation is central to the present framework: it predicts that monitoring manipulations primarily affect access (A, B), while persistence may be comparatively better explained by fatigue-like constraints (B3).

# The Regime Distinction

A permissive regime is defined as a condition in which perceptual and affective signals are not required to close evaluatively. Recognition does not automatically recruit preference. Discrepancies can remain unresolved without being treated as problems to fix, interpret, or optimize.

An evaluative regime is defined by comparison, narrative framing, goal orientation, or explicit measurement. Experience must be assessed, stabilized, or made instrumentally coherent.

The same stimulus can yield different outcomes depending on regime

**Two Sources of Evaluative Collapse**

Evaluative regimes can be induced in two ways.

First, contextually. External demands such as ratings, performance framing, time pressure, comparison tasks, or explicit measurement can recruit evaluative processing and reorganize experience.

Second, endogenously. Even in the absence of external demands, individuals may operate under high internal monitoring. Anticipatory testing, self-narration, or optimization tendencies can sustain an evaluative regime without visible prompts.

Regime outcomes therefore reflect an interaction between contextual evaluation and endogenous evaluative load.

Minimizing external measurement is necessary but not always sufficient for preserving permissive conditions.

**Operational Indicators**

The framework does not introduce new emotion categories.

It proposes regime-sensitive structural indicators:

– Engagement continuity rather than intensity ratings
– Recognition without preference
– Resistance to interruption
– Absence of spontaneous evaluative narration

These indicators detect whether engagement persists at all under low-evaluation conditions.

**Developmental Exposure as Proxy, Not Definition**

Endogenous evaluative load cannot be directly measured without risking collapse of the phenomenon itself. For this reason, developmental exposure variables can be used as indirect proxies.

For example, early environments characterized by low supervision, limited structured scheduling, and reduced performance pressure may reduce cumulative exposure to monitoring. Such variables do not define evaluative load, nor do they guarantee access preservation. They serve only to test whether cumulative early monitoring is sufficient to explain later inaccessibility.

If access loss were solely cumulative, individuals with lower early monitoring should show robust re-entry under permissive conditions. If access can also close through a discrete structural shift toward anticipatory testing, then early permissiveness will not be uniformly protective.

Developmental history is therefore a test variable, not an ontological definition of load.

**Falsifiability**

The regime account would be challenged if:

1. Engagement collapses even when both contextual evaluative demands are minimized and endogenous monitoring is demonstrably low.

2. Introducing evaluative operations does not reduce engagement under otherwise identical conditions.

3. No difference appears between stimuli that preserve unresolved discrepancy and those that aggressively close it, under matched regime conditions.

4. Observed effects are fully explained by novelty, passive salience, or sensory load alone.

The claim is intended as structural and diagnostic. It concerns the conditions under which engagement can persist, not its magnitude or category.

**Domains of Application**

The regime variable scales across domains:

– Children's engagement with unresolved perceptual violations
– The fragility of play under observation
– Educational contexts with early performance framing

– Adult affect under self-monitoring
– Well-being research relying on continuous self-measurement

In each case, outcomes may depend less on content than on whether experience must be evaluated.

**Minimal Thesis**

The same experience functions differently depending on whether it must be evaluated. Regime structure, rather than stimulus intensity alone, may determine whether certain forms of engagement can emerge.

# The Z Architecture: A Three-Component Model of Evaluative Load

Z is not a personality trait, nor a single latent variable. It refers to evaluative load, the degree to which experience is recruited into monitoring, justification, anticipation, and optimization. For analytical clarity, Z is decomposed into three distinct components.

## 1. Z_acc – Accumulated Evaluative Load

Z_acc refers to cumulative exposure to monitoring and evaluative structuring over time. It includes developmental exposure, such as early supervision, performance framing, structured scheduling, and comparative environments, as well as adult consolidation through repeated self-monitoring, narrative reinforcement, and optimization habits.

Z_acc operates gradually. It increases the probability that evaluative processing becomes the default mode of experience. However, it does not by itself imply irreversible closure. High accumulated load narrows the range of contexts in which permissive regimes can stabilize, but does not logically require permanent inaccessibility.

Z_acc is indirectly measurable through structural exposure variables, not through introspective self-report.

## 2. Z_shift – Discrete Structural Transition

Z_shift refers to a non-gradual transition in which anticipatory monitoring becomes stably recruited. It occurs when experience is no longer allowed to unfold, but becomes something to be tested for return.

This shift is not defined by accumulation, but by structural reorganization. A single recognition event, such as the realization that a previously available experiential regime does not reliably return when anticipated, may be sufficient to recruit stable anticipatory evaluation.

Once established, Z_shift functions as a logical lock. Even in low-demand contexts, experience may be pre-emptively monitored. Z_shift explains abrupt loss of access in individuals with otherwise low cumulative exposure.

Unlike Z_acc, it is not indexed by degree, but by presence or absence.

### 3. Z_ctx – Contextual Evaluative Load

Z_ctx refers to evaluative demands induced by the immediate environment. These include ratings, preference judgments, performance framing, time pressure, comparison tasks, explicit measurement, or visible observation.

Z_ctx is experimentally manipulable. Reducing Z_ctx is necessary to preserve permissive regimes. However, lowering contextual load does not eliminate Z_shift or Z_acc. Contextual permissivity may fail if internal evaluative recruitment remains active.

## Regime Collapse as Interaction

Regime stability reflects the interaction of these three components.

Z_acc increases baseline evaluative probability.
Z_shift introduces structural anticipatory monitoring.
Z_ctx acts as a trigger or amplifier.

The probability of regime collapse can therefore be expressed as:

Regime collapse probability = f(Z_acc, Z_shift, Z_ctx)

No single component is sufficient in all cases. High Z_ctx can induce collapse even when accumulated load is low. A present Z_shift can sustain collapse even under minimal contextual evaluation. High Z_acc narrows the window of stability and increases vulnerability to contextual triggers.

## Methodological Implication

Because evaluative load can be internally sustained, minimizing contextual evaluation is necessary but not always sufficient for preserving permissive regimes. Developmental exposure variables serve only as indirect proxies for Z_acc; they do not define evaluative structure and do not guarantee access preservation.

The framework is falsifiable. If regime stability proves largely independent of these components, the explanatory value of the Z architecture would be substantially weakened.

The minimal claim is structural: experiential regimes differ not only by content, but by the degree to which evaluation is recruited. Z specifies how that recruitment is distributed across accumulation, discrete transition, and context.

# Threshold dynamics

**Threshold entry**
A transition into ease that is hypothesized to occur as a discontinuity rather than as a gradual improvement. The signature is “nothing, nothing, nothing, then sudden shift”.

**Regime shift**
A qualitative change in the global affective mode, often with multi-domain generalization.

**Fragile entry, stable after crossing**
The claim that entry is easily blocked by monitoring, but once crossed the state can persist surprisingly well.

**Lock-in window**
The temporal interval following threshold entry during which the regime shift becomes functionally stabilized. During this window, evaluative probes are less likely to terminate the state than to prevent its initial onset, consistent with the prevention-versus-termination asymmetry.

**Clean failure**
A protocol-compliant session with a clear zero outcome (no entry). Clean failures are treated as informative under a threshold model.

**Invalid session (monitoring confound)**
A session where the subject engaged in checking, trying, time tracking, or covert optimization. Such sessions should not be interpreted as falsifying the mechanism.

**Brittleness**
The property that the transition is state-dependent and context-sensitive, producing many zeros and occasional large jumps.

# Monitoring, Evaluation, Optimization

**Capture** refers to the moment when an ongoing perceptual or affective episode shifts from background processing to becoming an object of control. The system renders it **evaluable**, which automatically installs comparison, justification, optimization, or tracking (“did it work?”, “how long?”, “is it the same?”). Capture is not a conscious intention. It is a structural transition: the episode becomes monitorable, therefore the permissive regime ends.

**Decapture** is the reverse operation: an episode becomes **non-object** again, meaning it is no longer treated as a variable to monitor, improve, explain, or stabilize. Decapture is not “convincing yourself it doesn’t matter”. It is an actual loss of evaluative grip: monitoring ceases to have authority over the unfolding episode.

**Optimization**
Goal-directed control aimed at improving outcomes, performance, or efficiency. Optimization is treated as a default adult mode that increases Z and blocks ease entry.

**Micro-optimization**
Small corrective adjustments performed after an action, perception, or choice, often utomatic. Micro-optimization is treated as a high-leverage suppressor of entry.

**Suspension of optimization**
A permissive control regime in which optimization, evaluation, and performance correction are temporarily offline. In this regime, signals of success and failure lose functional relevance, no trajectory is being actively steered toward an outcome, and experience can unfold without being forced to close.

**Premature closure**
The urge to finish, resolve, or complete a perceptual or cognitive episode. Premature closure increases monitoring and reduces openness.

**Anticipatory commitment**
Committing too early to a plan, interpretation, or “correct” action. Anticipatory commitment is treated as a driver of evaluation pressure.

# A Mechanistic Distinction Between Mindfulness and Suspension

## 1. Why the confusion matters

Many individuals intuitively treat “letting go” as a single psychological operation. Consequently, suspension is often interpreted as a variant of meditation or as a subset of mindfulness practice. This conflation matters because the two procedures target different functional mechanisms. When suspension is attempted using a standard mindfulness strategy, the monitoring layer typically remains active. Individuals may then report that “nothing happens” and conclude that suspension is either ineffective or merely a relabeling of mindfulness. From a structural standpoint, however, this reflects a category error: mindfulness primarily cultivates stable observation of experience, whereas suspension targets the interruption of premature evaluative closure.

Suspension is therefore not primarily an attentional training procedure. It is better characterized as a micro-level inhibition of control operations, specifically those that finalize, justify, optimize, or correct the unfolding episode. Rather than enhancing observation, suspension aims to prevent early recruitment of evaluative commitment.

Operationally, suspension involves:
– interrupting anticipatory commitment,
– interrupting premature closure,
– preventing an incipient signal from consolidating into a control state,
– allowing a brief unresolved opening to remain without resolution,
– training a veto or gating function rather than sustained attention.

A practical distinction follows. Mindfulness can coexist with a stable sense of “I am observing this experience.” Suspension instead targets the impulse that generates that stance when it functions as a correctness check or closure reflex. The difference is not in surface phenomenology, but in the underlying control dynamics being recruited or inhibited.

Suspension can be described as:

- interrupting anticipatory commitment
- interrupting premature closure
- preventing a micro-signal from becoming a full control state

- creating a brief unresolved opening, then leaving it alone
- training the veto or gating function rather than attention

A practical marker is this: mindfulness can tolerate a stable sense of "I am observing." Suspension targets the impulse that creates that stance when it appears as a correctness-check or closure reflex.

Agents that can modulate suspension and its effects :

**Alcohol (very low dose) or other short-acting benzodiazepines as a monitoring relaxant**

A very low dose of alcohol or anxiolytic can sometimes help suspension, not by creating pleasure directly, but by weakening the background monitoring layer that keeps trying to evaluate, finalize, or "do it right." In other words, it can reduce the reflexive correctness-check that collapses the exercise. This is consistent with the idea that suspension fails when evaluation stays online. The effect, when it exists, is not a "state boost" but a reduction of closure pressure, making the micro-veto easier to execute.

**Coffee as a threshold-crossing amplifier for joy unlock**

A very low dose of coffee can sometimes help by pushing the system across a threshold where the regime shift becomes accessible. Rather than merely increasing arousal, caffeine may increase the probability that a brief suspension successfully propagates into a larger affective transition. In this framing, coffee is not the source of ease, it is a gain factor that helps the system cross a critical point, after which the ease regime can appear with its own signature.

The most common failure mode is importing the mindfulness frame into suspension.

**Mindfulness becomes performance**
Mindfulness often contains a subtle "doing it correctly" layer. People try to meditate well. That effort can keep monitoring and evaluation online. This is not a critique of mindfulness, it is simply a mismatch with suspension's target.

**Mindfulness becomes high-resolution rumination**
A person can turn mindfulness into a refined form of rumination: "I notice that I'm noticing that I'm worrying." This can reduce distress while still maintaining closure pressure.

**Suspension becomes avoidance**
If suspension is misunderstood as "push thoughts away," it becomes suppression.

That can feel like relief but does not train non-closure. It replaces closure with avoidance.

**Suspension becomes state chasing**
Suspension is usually discontinuous (seconds), because the goal is not to maintain a state, but to teach a specific non-execution move. If a person tries to hold suspension continuously, they often reintroduce control and turn it into mindfulness-like maintenance.

# Anti-Instrumentality Glossary

**Reverse-flow**
A state family in which positive affect increases when optimization and performance intent decrease, rather than increase. The defining property is that "trying to win" collapses the state.

**Veto (control veto)**
The rapid cancellation of emerging positive affect or specialness by evaluative control. Veto is treated as a functional mechanism, not as a "choice".

**Specialness veto (salience down-regulation)**
A specific veto subtype where specialness is cancelled by explanation, comparison, reproduction attempts, or "making it count".

**instrumentalization**
The conversion of a non-instrumental activity into a means to an end ("this is for something"). Instrumentalization is treated as a direct collapse trigger.

**Measurement intrusion**
Any measurement act (rating, introspection, time tracking, explicit reporting) that recruits evaluation and increases Z_ctx.

## Method and protocol objects

**Non-Use**
A structural constraint: performing an activity while preventing it from becoming useful, performance-oriented, or meaning-producing.

**Non-Use Task (Morin Non-Use Task)**
A short probe protocol designed to disrupt evaluative optimization indirectly, using a standardized low-stakes environment (UT99) and warm-up exercises.

**Warm-up (concept acquisition)**
A short phase (2-4 days) designed to teach recognition of control operations (monitoring, closure, micro-optimization). It is not training.

**UT99 protocol**
A standardized 3-day probe using Unreal Tournament 1999 with reduced performance salience (HUD off, low resolution), designed to support non-use and reduce evaluation.

**Minimal log**
A low-burden tracking format: access (yes/no), latency, duration, intensity, and context.

**Multi-domain signature**
Generalization of the ease regime beyond the task context (perception, bodily pleasure responsiveness, reduced friction).

# Pharmacological Constraint Note on Transient Re-Opening

The Ease framework predicts that access to a permissive high-positive regime is primarily limited by early evaluative capture, not by insufficient hedonic capacity. This implies a distinction between (i) pharmacological stabilization of the regime, which is unlikely, and (ii) transient pharmacological re-opening of the entry window, which is logically compatible with the framework. No compounds, targets, or delivery strategies are proposed. The purpose of this note is to state minimal constraints and falsifiable predictions for any such re-opening effect.

**Core claim**

If high Z blocks entry by stabilizing anticipatory evaluative coupling, then any intervention capable of transiently reducing early capture could, in principle, re-open access to Ease in a subset of individuals. This does not imply that Ease can be straightforwardly pharmacologically maintained as a stable state. The predicted effect, if present, would be expected to modulate entry probability rather than to stabilize a sustained regime.

**Scope and non-claim**

This note does not propose a pharmacological program, does not list candidate compounds, and does not imply that any known intervention reliably produces Ease. The point is structural: pharmacology is mentioned only as one possible perturbation channel among others, constrained by the same non-instrumentality and methodification limits as behavioral Non-Use tasks.

Mechanistic constraint (framework-level)

A successful transient perturbation, if it exists, must satisfy the following constraints:

1. Entry-selective modulation. It should primarily increase entry probability and reduce time-to-threshold, rather than prolong post-threshold persistence.

2. Anti-instrumental compatibility. It must not function as a controllable technique. If the intervention becomes instrumentable, it should either lose efficacy or collapse the regime at entry.

3. Window dependence. The effect should be strongest during early vulnerability (pre-lock-in) and weak once the regime is established.

4. Non-reward framing. The perturbation should not act as a simple amplifier of reward intensity, pleasure, or motivation. It must instead reduce early anticipatory closure.

**Falsifiable predictions**

P1. Entry-only signature
If a transient pharmacological perturbation increases the probability of entering Ease, it should show weak effects on the duration of established episodes once entry has occurred.

P2. Timing asymmetry
Early evaluative probes should remain strongly disruptive during the entry phase even under the perturbation. The perturbation should widen the entry window rather than remove the entry fragility.

P3. Z-selective benefit
The effect, if present, should be most visible in high-Z individuals (low baseline access), while producing weaker or negligible changes in low-Z individuals (already permissive access).

P4. Methodification penalty
Repeated use should show a non-monotonic curve: early apparent gains, followed by plateau or decline as the intervention becomes cognitively represented as a method, recruiting anticipatory monitoring.

Relation to the main framework
These constraints follow directly from the core claim that Ease is a regime defined by reduced evaluative coupling, not by increased hedonic signaling. A pharmacological re-opening, if it exists, would therefore be expected to behave similarly to Non-Use tasks: it may facilitate entry without being able to stabilize the regime, and it should fail under instrumentalization.

The intervention class is intentionally not enumerated

## Window Dependence

Window dependence refers to the prediction that access to ease is temporally asymmetric. The system is most vulnerable to evaluative capture at the entry phase, when anticipatory monitoring can still recruit and stabilize. Once the threshold is crossed, the regime may enter a temporary lock-in window during which evaluative probes have reduced destructive power.

This does not imply invulnerability. Rather, it specifies that collapse probability is highest before or during threshold formation, and lower after regime stabilization. Monitoring at entry prevents the shift. Monitoring after lock-in is more likely to weaken or gradually erode the state than to terminate it immediately.

The framework therefore predicts time-sensitive disruption effects: identical evaluative probes should have stronger collapse effects early than late. This asymmetry is structural and testable.

## Non-Monotonic Repetition Predictions

Repeated attempts to induce ease should not produce a simple linear improvement curve. Instead, the framework predicts a non-monotonic trajectory across sessions.

Early repetitions may increase entry probability through familiarity with structural constraints and reduced confusion. However, beyond a certain point, repetition risks methodification. The task becomes represented as a technique. Anticipatory evaluation increases. Entry probability declines.

The expected curve is therefore:
initial instability → partial improvement → plateau → decline under instrumentalization pressure.

This pattern, if empirically supported, would distinguish the framework from standard skill-acquisition models. In a pure skill model, repetition yields monotonic strengthening. In the present model, repetition increases evaluative coupling unless structural variation prevents stabilization of a “how-to” representation.

Structural variation is therefore predicted to restore access more effectively than exact repetition, because it disrupts cached optimization policies and reduces anticipatory monitoring recruitment.

# Measurement Paradox in Affect Research

The measurement paradox refers to a structural problem in affect research: the very act of measuring a regime can recruit the evaluative processes that prevent its emergence. When a state depends on reduced monitoring at entry, any procedure that increases self-checking, performance framing, or explicit evaluation may systematically suppress the phenomenon under investigation.

This does not imply that measurement is impossible. It implies that measurement must be temporally and structurally separated from the fragile entry phase. Failure to do so risks producing false negatives, misclassifying absence of access as absence of capacity.

### Measurement Intrusion

Measurement intrusion occurs when assessment procedures increase evaluative load during the critical entry window. This includes rating prompts, real-time intensity scales, time tracking, explicit performance framing, or repeated introspective probes.

Intrusion is strongest when measurement is:

- concurrent with the task,
- framed as performance evaluation,
- tied to comparison or progress metrics,
- frequent enough to recruit monitoring.

Under the framework, such intrusion primarily reduces entry probability rather than post-threshold persistence. The prediction is that identical stimuli will produce different outcomes depending on whether measurement is present at entry.

### Post-hoc Measurement

Post-hoc measurement refers to assessment performed after the episode has ended. By delaying evaluation, post-hoc reporting minimizes disruption during the fragile entry phase.

The framework predicts that:

- entry probability should be higher under post-hoc reporting than under concurrent reporting,

- time-to-threshold should be shorter,
- persistence once entered should show weaker sensitivity to measurement timing.

Post-hoc measurement does not eliminate evaluative load entirely, but it reduces its impact on threshold crossing.

**Behavioral Proxies**

Behavioral proxies are non-verbal or minimally evaluative indicators used to infer regime presence without directly querying subjective state during entry.

Examples include:

- engagement continuity,
- resistance to minor interruption,
- latency to disengage,
- spontaneous re-engagement without prompting,
- choice patterns under low metric visibility.

These proxies aim to reduce self-monitoring and minimize Z_ctx. They do not replace subjective report, but they reduce reliance on concurrent introspection.

The framework predicts that phenomena governed by threshold dynamics should be detectable via coarse behavioral measures if the regime shift is sufficiently large.

**Blind-to-Hypothesis Design**

A blind-to-hypothesis design reduces expectancy and anticipatory evaluation by limiting participants' knowledge of the target state. Participants perform structurally constrained tasks without being told what outcome is expected.

This design aims to reduce:

- anticipatory testing,
- correctness-check thoughts,
- state chasing,

- demand characteristics that increase monitoring.

The prediction is that entry probability will be higher under partial blindness than under explicit instruction to “try to access” the state.

In sum, the measurement paradox does not deny empirical study. It specifies that access-dependent regimes require low-instrumentation designs, temporal separation of entry and evaluation, and structural minimization of evaluative recruitment during the threshold phase.

**Spontaneous Reporting in High-Intensity Regimes**

In the specific case of ease, the framework allows an additional reporting pathway: spontaneous communication initiated by the participant.

Because ease is defined as a high-intensity, discontinuous regime shift with a strong somatic signature, its occurrence is typically salient. In adults, where baseline access is often rare, the spontaneous impulse is not to suppress the episode but to acknowledge or report it. The instinctive reaction is frequently communicative rather than evaluative in the performance sense.

This creates a structural asymmetry relative to mild affective states. Low-intensity or ambiguous states require probing and scale-based capture. Ease, when present, tends to exceed detection threshold without prompting.

For this reason, the framework permits optional participant-initiated reporting after the episode, without mandatory concurrent rating. Participants may communicate the occurrence if they wish, rather than being required to monitor continuously.

This does not eliminate measurement intrusion risk. However, because the state is high amplitude and rare in adulthood, spontaneous reporting is less likely to fabricate the phenomenon and less likely to be confused with ordinary mood fluctuation.

The prediction is that, under low-instrumentation conditions, a subset of participants will voluntarily report entry without prompting. The absence of such spontaneous reporting under permissive conditions constitutes informative data, particularly in high-Z individuals.

Thus, in the case of ease, minimal, voluntary post-episode reporting is considered compatible with preserving entry integrity, provided it does not recruit anticipatory monitoring during the threshold phase.

# Developmental Exposure as Proxy

Developmental exposure variables are treated in this framework as indirect structural proxies for accumulated evaluative load (Z_acc), not as defining features of ease access. Early environmental conditions may influence the baseline probability that experience becomes organized under evaluative monitoring, but they do not determine access in a deterministic way.

The central claim is probabilistic: repeated exposure to monitoring, performance framing, comparison, and structured evaluation during development may increase the likelihood that evaluative recruitment becomes default. However, developmental exposure alone cannot explain all cases of access loss, nor does low exposure guarantee preservation.

Developmental variables therefore function as test probes for cumulative load hypotheses, not as ontological definitions of the mechanism.

### Supervision and Scheduling

High supervision environments, dense scheduling, and early structuring of time around goals and performance may increase exposure to evaluative coupling. When activities are frequently observed, assessed, corrected, or optimized, children may learn to treat experience as something that must justify itself.

Conversely, environments characterized by unsupervised time, open-ended play, limited performance framing, and reduced adult correction may reduce cumulative evaluative exposure. In such contexts, discrepancies can remain unresolved without immediate optimization pressure.

The framework predicts that individuals with lower cumulative exposure to structured monitoring should, on average, show higher entry probability under permissive adult conditions, all else equal.

However, this is a statistical tendency, not a rule. Developmental permissiveness does not immunize against later structural shifts.

### Performance Framing

Performance framing refers to early exposure to ranking, grading, comparison, visible metrics, or identity-linked evaluation. When enjoyment becomes contingent on achievement or legitimacy, evaluation-before-pleasure ordering may become stabilized.

Repeated performance framing may increase the probability that positive affect becomes conditional on appraisal. Under this model, developmental exposure to

comparison and optimization increases Z_acc by reinforcing evaluative recruitment as the default mode of engagement.

The prediction is not that high performance environments eliminate access entirely, but that they narrow the stability window for permissive regimes and increase vulnerability to contextual evaluative triggers in adulthood.

**Sibling Structure as a Developmental Moderator**

Sibling configuration is treated here as a potential moderator of accumulated evaluative load (Z_acc), rather than as a direct cause of preserved or impaired access. The framework does not assume that only-child status is inherently protective. Instead, it proposes that certain early domestic configurations may differentially influence exposure to evaluative recruitment.

In particular, lower sibling density may be associated, under specific conditions, with:

– increased unstructured solitary time,
– reduced within-household comparison pressure,
– fewer recurrent status negotiations in shared play contexts,
– lower frequency of performance optimization within peer hierarchies.

These factors may reduce early exposure to comparative micro-contexts that stabilize evaluative processing as a default mode. However, this effect is conditional. If lower sibling density is accompanied by high supervision intensity, frequent performance framing, or identity-linked achievement expectations, accumulated evaluative load may remain equal or even increase relative to multi-child environments.

The model therefore treats sibling structure as one component within a broader developmental configuration that includes supervision density, performance framing frequency, and evaluative observation. Its effect is probabilistic rather than categorical.

The corresponding falsifiable prediction is structural: under matched adult low-evaluation experimental conditions, individuals exposed to lower early comparative density, controlling for supervision intensity and current contextual load, should display higher entry probability, shorter time-to-threshold, and greater resistance to evaluative probes at entry. Failure to observe such patterns under adequate sampling would weaken the cumulative exposure component of the model.

**Developmental Memory Asymmetry Hypothesis**

If ease operates as a default permissive regime in childhood, it will not be encoded as a salient autobiographical event. Loss of access in adulthood will not produce a clear

loss memory, because there was no explicit “gain” memory to begin with. Adults may therefore underestimate the affective richness of childhood, not overestimate it.

**Limits of Cumulative Explanation**

Accumulation alone is insufficient to explain abrupt access collapse. The framework introduces Z_shift to account for discrete structural transitions that cannot be reduced to gradual exposure.

An individual with relatively low cumulative monitoring may still experience a sudden loss of access if anticipatory testing becomes stabilized. Conversely, individuals with high cumulative exposure may retain access under specific structural conditions.

Therefore, developmental exposure is neither necessary nor sufficient for adult inaccessibility. It modulates baseline probability but does not define the mechanism.

The model remains falsifiable: if developmental exposure proxies fail to correlate with entry probability under controlled low-evaluation conditions, the cumulative load hypothesis weakens. If abrupt loss patterns cannot be distinguished from gradual accumulation effects, the discrete shift construct loses explanatory value.

In summary, developmental exposure variables are treated as structural predictors of Z_acc, not as definitions of ease access, and not as exclusive explanations for regime collapse.

# Ease Open-State Questionnaire (EOSQ)

The Ease Open-State Questionnaire (EOSQ) is designed to detect the presence of a fully open ease regime in adult experience. It does not measure general happiness, optimism, life satisfaction, or personality traits. It targets a specific, high-amplitude regime defined by its sensory signature, discontinuity at onset, and sustained positive affect mode.

Unlike broad affect scales, the EOSQ assumes that ease, when present, is qualitatively distinct and somatically anchored. The instrument therefore focuses on regime markers rather than evaluative judgments about well-being.

**Regime Signature Description**

Ease fully open is defined as a global affective mode characterized by:

- a sudden threshold transition rather than gradual improvement,
- strong thoracic or jaw-centered wave-like pleasure,
- perceptual texture shifts,
- sustained high positive affect over extended duration,
- reduced internal friction and monitoring.

The regime is not identified by intensity alone. It is identified by its structure: discontinuous entry, embodied signature, and stability once crossed.

Participants are instructed to answer based on adult experience within a defined time window, typically the last 12 months, to reduce retrospective distortion.

**Sensory Markers**

The EOSQ operationalizes ease through concrete sensory triggers rather than abstract descriptions.

Key markers include:

- automatic chest or jaw wave responses to simple songs, religious chants, or childlike signals,
- somatic responses to abrupt camera cuts independent of narrative meaning,
- pleasure triggered by perceptual impossibility, cartoons, or surreal visual violations,
- perceptual texture shifts such as visual granularity or warmth changes,
- responses to saturated, luminous, or “precious” aesthetics.

These markers are chosen because they are less dependent on autobiographical narrative and more closely tied to immediate perceptual-affective coupling.

The prediction is that high scorers will show consistent cross-domain reactivity rather than isolated aesthetic preferences.

**Sustained High-Positive Mode**

In addition to micro-trigger responses, the EOSQ assesses sustained episodes.

Items probe:

- the ability to maintain high positive affect for hours,
- the presence of stable, not peak-like, elevation,
- the somatic persistence of thoracic pleasure during these episodes,
- the possibility that intensity becomes almost overwhelming due to amplitude rather than effort.

The framework distinguishes this from excitement, pride, or achievement-based pleasure. Sustained ease is not performance-contingent and does not accumulate into progress narratives.

The prediction is that high EOSQ scores should correlate more strongly with entry probability under permissive conditions than with standard trait positive affect scales.

**Screening Logic**

The EOSQ functions as a screening tool for regime presence, not as a diagnostic or clinical instrument.

High scores indicate that the ease regime is:

- currently accessible,
- repeatable,
- somatically anchored,
- structurally stable once entered.

Low scores do not imply anhedonia or low well-being. They may indicate:

- high accumulated evaluative load,
- presence of a discrete structural shift,
- limited exposure to permissive contexts,
- or simply low trigger density in current lifestyle.

The framework predicts that:

- High EOSQ individuals should display shorter time-to-threshold in Non-Use paradigms.
- Low EOSQ individuals should show higher sensitivity to evaluative probes at entry.
- EOSQ should predict entry probability more strongly than post-threshold persistence duration.

In summary, the EOSQ operationalizes the regime signature of ease through concrete sensory and temporal markers, allowing structural detection without heavy concurrent instrumentation.

## Evaluation-Before-Pleasure (EBP)

Evaluation-Before-Pleasure (EBP) is proposed as a structural construct capturing a specific ordering shift in positive affect accessibility. It does not measure how much enjoyment a person experiences. It measures whether evaluative cognition tends to precede and gate enjoyment.

The core hypothesis is that, for some individuals, positive affect becomes conditional on appraisal. Instead of enjoyment emerging first and being optionally reflected upon, evaluation occurs first and must authorize the onset of pleasure.

EBP therefore targets a gating mechanism, not mood level.

**Construct Definition**

Evaluation-Before-Pleasure is defined as:

The tendency for evaluative cognition, including judgment, optimization, justification, performance-checking, and self-monitoring, to occur prior to and constrain the onset of enjoyment, such that positive affect becomes conditional on appraisal rather than emerging spontaneously.

EBP is not:

- low positive affect,
- depressive anhedonia,
- global rumination,
- perfectionism as an outcome trait,
- savoring after onset.

A person can report high enjoyment overall and still score high on EBP if their enjoyment typically requires internal permission or legitimacy checking.

Structurally, EBP corresponds to elevated entry sensitivity to evaluation, consistent with increased Z recruitment at onset.

**Scale Items (EBP-8)**

The EBP-8 scale is a brief self-report instrument designed to capture this ordering pattern in adults.

Response format:
1 to 7 scale, from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree.

Items:

1. I often spend time adjusting the experience instead of simply enjoying it.

2. Enjoyment often feels like it requires internal permission.
3. When I enter performance mode, enjoyment becomes inaccessible.
4. I find it harder to enjoy something when I feel observed, even indirectly.
5. When I notice myself enjoying something, the enjoyment tends to decrease.
6. I struggle to enjoy things that do not fit the kind of person I want to be.
7. If I am unsure whether something would be considered good taste, I struggle to enjoy it.
8. In neutral moments, my mind automatically starts evaluating things, which prevents enjoyment.

Optional reverse-scored item:

9. I can feel enjoyment without needing to decide whether it is good or worth it.

Scoring:

EBP score equals the mean of the non-reversed items, with item 9 reversed if included. Higher scores indicate stronger evaluation-first gating.

The scale is intentionally brief to reduce respondent fatigue and secondary evaluation.

**Developmental Add-On**

The framework hypothesizes that EBP may emerge or intensify during adolescence for a substantial subset of individuals.

A minimal retrospective add-on captures timing:

A. Do you feel this pattern emerged or intensified during adolescence?
B. Around what age did it begin?
C. Did the change feel sudden or gradual?

These items are exploratory and treated as subjective developmental narratives rather than objective timestamps.

The model predicts that higher EBP scores will often be associated with reported adolescence onset, though not universally.

### Validation Predictions

The EBP construct generates falsifiable predictions.

Dissociation from Positive Affect Level
EBP should show only moderate or weak correlation with standard positive affect scales. High enjoyment frequency does not preclude high EBP.

Association with Self-Consciousness and Optimization
EBP should correlate positively with measures of self-consciousness, performance orientation, and experience-optimization tendencies.

Partial Overlap with Rumination
EBP should correlate with rumination, especially brooding, but remain factor-separable because EBP content can be neutral rather than negative.

Dissociation from Savoring
Savoring reflects amplification after positive affect onset. EBP reflects gating prior to onset. The two constructs should not collapse into a single factor.

Prediction of Entry Sensitivity
Under experimental low-evaluation conditions, individuals with high EBP scores should show lower entry probability and longer time-to-threshold relative to low-EBP individuals, even when overall positive affect levels are comparable.

In summary, EBP operationalizes a specific cognitive ordering mechanism that may contribute to developmental changes in positive affect accessibility. It is intended as a structural complement to the Z architecture and threshold model rather than as a global well-being metric.

## Structural Summary

The framework proposes that ease is not best understood as a quantity of positive affect, but as a regime-level configuration. The central distinction is structural: permissive versus evaluative organization of experience.

Under permissive conditions, perceptual and affective signals are not required to justify, optimize, or stabilize themselves. Discrepancies may remain unresolved. Recognition does not automatically recruit preference or ranking. Entry into ease under these conditions is discontinuous, characterized by threshold dynamics rather than gradual improvement.

Under evaluative conditions, experience must be assessed, compared, justified, or made coherent. Monitoring becomes active. Anticipatory testing recruits control processes that prevent threshold formation.

The Z architecture decomposes evaluative load into three components: accumulated exposure (Z_acc), discrete structural transition (Z_shift), and contextual induction (Z_ctx). Entry probability and time-to-threshold are primarily sensitive to these components, whereas post-threshold persistence is comparatively less dependent on monitoring and more constrained by fatigue-like processes.

Measurement procedures, repetition structure, and attribution framing can all alter entry probability by recruiting evaluation. Many apparent failures of replication in affect research may reflect regime-induced collapse rather than absence of the phenomenon.

**Minimal Thesis**

The minimal thesis of the framework is structural:

Certain high-positive experiential regimes may depend critically on conditions in which anticipatory evaluative coupling fails to recruit at entry.

Ease is not defined by intensity, relaxation, reward, or meaning. It is defined by a permissive coordination mode that collapses when treated as a tool.

Monitoring acts primarily as an access constraint rather than as a continuous suppressor. Entry is fragile. After threshold crossing, temporary lock-in can occur. Repetition produces non-monotonic effects due to methodification pressure. Developmental exposure modulates baseline probability but does not determine access deterministically.

If entry probability proves independent of evaluative load, if durable instrumental techniques reliably produce stable access, or if repetition yields monotonic strengthening without collapse, the framework is false.

25. Open Empirical Questions

Several empirical questions remain open and testable.

First, to what extent do Z proxies predict entry probability independently of trait positive affect? A clean dissociation would support the structural gating hypothesis.

Second, can entry-phase disruption by evaluative probes be experimentally separated from termination effects after threshold crossing? Time-sensitive asymmetry is central to the model.

Third, does repetition reliably produce a non-monotonic curve across individuals, and can structural variation restore access more effectively than exact repetition?

Fourth, does EBP predict entry sensitivity beyond standard rumination and self-consciousness measures?

Fifth, do only-child developmental profiles without compensatory overprotection show higher entry probability under matched permissive conditions?

Sixth, can low-instrumentation, blind-to-hypothesis designs reliably detect spontaneous reporting of ease episodes in high-amplitude cases?

Each of these questions yields falsifiable predictions tied to entry probability, time-to-threshold, and persistence separation.

**Boundaries of the Framework**

The framework does not claim to explain all forms of joy, flow, reward learning, or well-being. It does not assert that ease is universally desirable, nor that it should be maximized. It does not propose pharmacological programs or clinical prescriptions.

It does not reduce all positive affect to regime dynamics, nor does it deny the role of motivation, learning, or reinforcement in other affective phenomena.

The framework is limited to a specific structural claim: that certain experiential modes are access-constrained by evaluative recruitment, and that this constraint operates primarily at entry.

It remains agnostic about ultimate neural implementation beyond the requirement that anticipatory monitoring must fail to stabilize during threshold formation.

If future data were to show that ease-compatible regimes can be reliably produced, stabilized, and instrumentally controlled without loss, the non-instrumentality claim would require revision.

If evaluative manipulations do not differentially affect entry versus persistence, the threshold asymmetry claim fails.

Within these boundaries, the framework offers a testable architecture linking developmental exposure, monitoring structure, measurement design, and discontinuous affective transitions.