“I understand everything, but I still feel differently.”

Conditions for Change in Transference-Focused Psychotherapy: *Defensive and Structural Constraints on Therapeutic Transformation*

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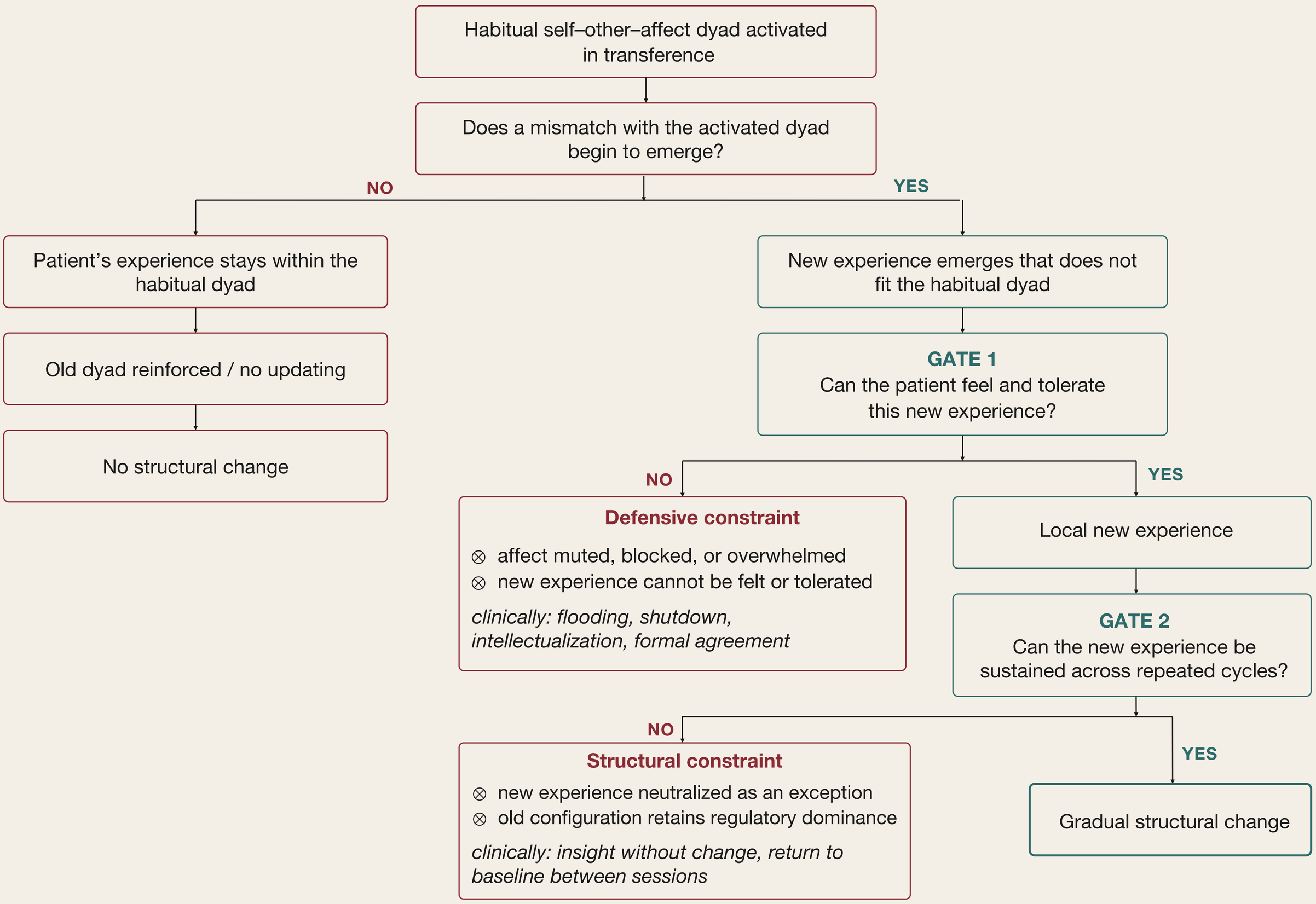
Conceptual framework

This work builds on a neuropsychoanalytic model of resistance to change (Sokolova, 2026), which reframes psychoanalytic understanding of therapeutic transformation through predictive processing (Friston, 2010; Solms, 2021).

Object–relational dyads — self–other–affect configurations — function as the mind’s learned relational expectations. Change requires a lived relational mismatch — a clinically meaningful prediction error — that can be felt, tolerated, repeated, and gradually integrated.

From “Which dyad is active?” to “Can new experience emerge — and be sustained — once the dyad is activated?”



Conditions for Therapeutic Transformation

1. The habitual dyad is activated in the transference
2. New experience emerges that does not fit the dyad
3. The new experience can be felt and tolerated
4. It is sustained across repeated cycles, not neutralized as an exception
5. An alternative organization gradually accumulates regulatory weight through mourning and repetition

Clinical illustration

A middle-aged patient with narcissistic personality organization gradually understood the defensive function and destructiveness of her perfectionism — the inner requirement to be perfect to be loved. Yet letting go of it felt catastrophic:

“I can’t give up these demands.
And somewhere — I don’t want to.
Without them, I don’t know how to live. I lose meaning and direction.”

Affect was accessible and tolerable; insight was present. Yet the old configuration remained structurally indispensable: it organized meaning, direction, and the very structure through which she experienced herself.

Orienting questions for the TFP therapist

1. Is affect muted, overwhelming, or alive?
2. Does affect confirm the old dyad or signal mismatch?
3. Is new experience emerging, or is the same pattern being repeated?
4. What does the old configuration organize — identity, connection, meaning, orientation?

The dominant constraint determines the timing, dosing, and focus of intervention

Sokolova, A. (2026). Working Through Resistance: A Neuropsychoanalytic Model of Defensive and Structural Resistance to Change. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, in press.
Sokolova, A. Conditions for Change in Transference-Focused Psychotherapy: Two Process-Level Constraints on Therapeutic Transformation. Manuscript under review.