



# Being Attached: Weathering the Storm and Easing Friction in Relationships

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## Abstract

This review critically examines *Attached: The New Science of Adult Attachment and How It Can Help You Find and Keep Love* by Amir Levine and Rachel Heller, a book that distills complex psychological concepts into accessible insights on romantic relationships. Central to the book is the theoretical framework of attachment styles, secure, anxious, and avoidant, originally developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. The authors leverage these foundational theories to explore the dynamics of adult attachment through a combination of case studies, interviews, and empirical research. The review assesses the book's scientific underpinnings, particularly its application of developmental psychology to adult romantic relationships, highlighting its relevance for understanding how early attachments influence later life partnerships. The review further explores the book's discussion on the "dependency paradox" and the role of effective communication in fostering healthy relationships, emphasizing the practical implications of these insights in everyday relational scenarios. While the book offers a clear and engaging exploration of attachment theory's application to adult love, the review also critically evaluates its potential limitations, such as the oversimplification of complex relational dynamics and the broader societal influences that may affect attachment behaviors. By integrating insights from recent scholarly research and personal interpretations, this review provides a comprehensive analysis of *Attached*, assessing its value for individuals seeking greater self-awareness and healthier relationship patterns, while also suggesting areas for deeper inquiry beyond its popular science framework.

**Keywords:** Healthy relationships · Parental relationships · Attachment styles · Effective communication

Love might just be the most selfish feeling one can ever experience, a notion as debatable as it is deeply personal. Often, one may fall in love not solely for who the other person is, but for how they make 'you' feel, stirring up those fluttering butterflies within humans. Love can be described as individuals doing summersaults inside their body. The trembling, tingling sensation of anxious joy, a warmth humans have come to describe as 'butterflies.' In the 21st century, that is the contemporary world, relationships, attachment, love are perceived as quite complicated subjects especially for the present generation termed as 'Generation Z'. While attachment and love are natural, beautiful parts of the human experience, many young people today feel an intense fear of these emotions.

Humans value intimacy and crave intimate relationships but because of the preconceived notion of getting hurt in the process of getting attached or being emotionally vulnerable with an individual.

Especially the Gen Z, they crave authentic connection yet fear vulnerability, commitment, and the perceived loss of freedom that comes with attachment. Consequently, individuals sometimes find themselves engaging in self-sabotaging behaviours, keeping others at a distance, avoiding serious relationships, or retreating to casual encounters that don't fulfil their deeper emotional needs.

"Attached-The new Science of Adult Attachment and How It Can Help You Find and Keep Love" is a book (2010) by the psychiatrist and neuroscientist, Dr. Amir Levine, the Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry in the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Columbia University and Rachel Heller, the writer and psychologist. It explores attachment theory and how to apply it toward making adult relationships more fulfilling. Taking the insights from both these fields of practice, the attached book comes with interactive exercises that allow the reader to work out the attachment style to become more secure partners for themselves and their loved ones.

## Understanding Attachment Theory: A Framework for Relationships

The main attraction of the book was the numerous case studies the authors presented in front of the readers for the

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best comprehension of the theoretical foundations they posited. Levine and Heller begin with attachment theory building upon the noted works of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. Bowlby and Ainsworth identified three primary attachment styles Secure, Anxious, and Avoidant that significantly influence patterns in adult relationships. By grounding their discussion in these established attachment styles, Levine and Heller offer a framework through which adult relational dynamics can be better understood and navigated.

Secure people feel comfortable with intimacy and are usually warm and loving; Anxious people crave intimacy, are often preoccupied with their relationships, and tend to worry about their partner's ability to love them back; Avoidant people equate intimacy with a loss of independence and constantly try to minimise closeness (Levine and Heller, 2010).

The book expands on how secure people/individuals are able to maintain a healthy relationships because of the equal balance they are able to maintain between independence and closeness. Initially it was hypothesised that adult attachment style is determined by their upbringing, later it was found that it is also the by-product of genes and experiences one faces in life. As a psychoanalyst, Bowlby (1979) was of the view that Freud and his followers had acknowledged the importance of early relationships but had not integrated the interpretations into broader psychological and psychiatric science.

Using diverse empirical and theoretical sources, such as studies on infant maternal deprivation, primate behaviour, and Piaget's cognitive development theory, Bowlby concluded that an individual's basic sense of security, self-esteem, and well-being is founded upon the quality of early social bonds with primary caregivers. He also argued that, without the existence of consistent, supportive relationships, personality development may be adversely affected, culminating in critical psychological results (Shaver and Mikulincer, 2009).

The book explores the same notion of how responsive and available caregivers were analysing the attachment style individuals developed. The attachment bond isn't coincidental. Its primary purpose is to ensure the survival of the vulnerable infant, requiring the constant presence of a caregiver (Bowlby, 1973, 1980). However the authors also shine some light on the belief that attachment style developed in childhood is not immune to later challenges. Adverse experiences such as traumatic relationships, neglect, or emotional abuse can disturb one's sense of security, potentially fostering an insecure attachment style. This insight is particularly valuable for understanding that the process of becoming insecurely attached is often cumulative

and dynamic, as each new experience builds upon or alters previous relational expectations.

### ***Infant and Mother***

Elliot (1928) warned against "excessive motherly affection," suggesting that an ideal child would grow up autonomous, fearless, self-reliant, adaptable, and focused on work and play without forming strong attachments to any particular person or place. At that time, before Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby established attachment theory in the 1950s and 1960s, psychologists belittled the importance of the parent-child bond by considering a child's attachment to his mother as being only a reaction to food and nourishment. But he observed that children, although well fed and even bathed, without an attachment figure could not develop normally institution raised children and the evacuated children during World War II are cases in point. Such children experienced all-around retardation. Ainsworth and Bowlby's research concluded that the attachment between infant and caregiver is as essential to a child's survival and well-being as food and water (Levine and Heller, 2010).

For understanding more about attachment shift mechanisms, Levine and Heller (2009) delve into "protest behaviour, a term which John Bowlby described for the reactions of an infant that has been separated from his or her caregiver. Among such behaviours are crying, searching and an all-consuming longing all as part of biological efforts to reestablish contact. 'Attached' goes further and reveals that adults present similar behaviours in their own relations when they experience some disconnection or insecurity.

On an average how important are intimate relationships to humans? Is it measurable? The famous lyrics of the song *'There is a light that never goes out'* by The Smiths which goes *"And if a double-decker bus crashes into us To die by your side*

*Is such a heavenly way to die"*, is it the love or human dependency lyricist talking about. The authors of the book had done a great work in exploring how important human closeness and vulnerability is and how relevant it is to have a person that can calm their partner in difficult situation. In the book they explain an experiment.

Another understanding on how close relationships affect emotional regulation comes from research led by Dr. James Coan, director of the Affective Neuroscience Laboratory at the University of Virginia. He used functional MRI technology in collaboration with researchers Richard Davidson and Hillary Schaefer to measure brain activity during stressful conditions among married women. This involved telling women that they are going to receive a low-level electric shock in short time. This stimulated the hypothalamus, and it is the typical effect to stress.

When the woman gripped the hand of a stranger, this stimulated brain activity was reduced just a little. However when she gripped the hand of her husband, the hypothalamus stimulation was reduced many times over, which really means there was a much decrease in stress. Interestingly the greater the satisfaction of married women in their marriages was, the more relief their gripping their spouse's hands. This study demonstrates how close relationships are involved in the maintenance of psychological and emotional integrity for each partner, through physical proximity and emotional security, directly affecting the stress response.

An intriguing part of 'Attached -The new Science of Adult Attachment and How It Can Help You Find and Keep Love' is related to the biological mechanisms enabling attachment. Levine and Heller elaborated on how it's known that oxytocin enhances attachment. If close moments of cuddling or intimacy were involved, for example, oxytocin would release, making one bind even more securely. Again, it makes sense in relation to neurochemicals as to why secure attachment often tends to be cemented by repeated positive encounters with a partner. Bartels & Zeki (2004) scanned the brains of men, women, and mothers contemplating their loved ones and found activation in brain regions with high oxytocin, a hormone critical to bonding. Oxytocin is released in all scenarios for bonding, from stroking a dog to solving a conflict between partners. Beyond attachment enhancement, oxytocin promotes general health by lowering blood pressure, decreasing cortisol levels, and facilitating digestion, making love not only emotionally satisfying but healthy as well (Kuchinkas, 2009).

However, a lack of such intimacy might introduce distance into a relationship and diminish oxytocin, and possibly security, feelings. Levine and Heller (2009) suggest that when humans send the closeness to the backburner – for example, when individuals have to work and skip a cuddle session or have to do their own things at the expense of quality time – people unknowingly weaken the bond and invite relational conflict. The biological perspective also lends another dimension to understanding why a secure individual might swing the other way towards insecurity, particularly in relationships where emotional distance is considered a norm.

In this direction, Levine and Heller (2009) give guidance to the reader on ways to know whether a relationship is perhaps changing attachment security. The authors give "golden rules" in determining what shift in attachment style includes, such as whether an individual's partner avoids intimate behaviours, becomes overly preoccupied with the relationship, or responds negatively when honest approaches are taken towards communication with him or her. Upon doing so, a securely attached person might find changes that

may possibly shift her attachment style into the category of insecure range.

### **The Golden Rules for Deciphering Attachment Styles**

1. Determine whether s/he seeks intimacy and closeness
2. Assess how preoccupied s/he is with the relationship and how sensitive s/he is to rejection.
3. Don't rely on one "symptom," look for various signs.
4. Assess his/her reaction to effective communication.
5. Listen and look for what he or she is not saying or doing.

The phrase, "It is not you; it is me," is a familiar statement for many individuals, often encountered at some point in their lives. Typically, when a conversation concludes with this line, the recipient may internalise the notion that they are at fault, despite the responsibility ostensibly being assumed by the person who uttered the phrase. Well that is what the authors tried to change in this book. While recipients internalise this phrase, they are unexpectedly thrown into the pool where it explains different attachment styles, how each attachment styles are developed, how can someone identify an attachment style, how can someone transition to secure attachment styles from the insecure ones, and how a secure person being with an avoidant attachment style can turn the secure person to an anxious person.

When a secure person finds themselves in a relationship with an inconsistent or unresponsive partner, they often develop, unconsciously, protective behaviours marking the introduction of anxious or avoidant tendencies. For instance, they may begin to cling to their partner, grow jealous, or become obsessive over fears of abandonment. This change in behaviour illustrates how the attachment system is sensitive to perceived threat and activates behaviours that help create insecurity in once secure individuals. Levine and Heller (2009) are optimistic when discussing strategies for preserving or regaining secure attachment. The authors promote effective communication, self-awareness, and mutual support as the most important tools in preventing attachment insecurity. If a couple can develop open dialogue in their relationship, it becomes easier to deal with any potential attachment disruptions in their relationship. The famous seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza said: 'All happiness or unhappiness solely depends upon the quality of the object to which we are attached by love.' Therefore choosing wisely is important when an individual is getting attached to someone. Due to being unaware of the attachment system individuals risk themselves suffering to a great extend in relationships (Levine and Heller, 2010).

## **Transition from insecure to secure attachment pattern**

In the book 'Attached-The new Science of Adult Attachment and How It Can Help You Find and Keep Love', Levine and Heller show the key role effective communication can play in improving love relationships. A note for people on how to transition to a secure attachment relationship. They use various case studies to demonstrate effective communicating strategies within one's attachment style. Effective communication understands that persons have specific relational needs and these are mainly shaped by attachment patterns. For example, anxious people need to receive an increase in reassurance of their partner's love for them. The avoidant type tends to want an emotional or physical distance in order to hold on to their independence. Such attachment-based needs the authors advise should be expressed in clear, non-defensive language to increase mutual understanding and satisfaction in the relationship.

Effective communication builds confidence by empowering individuals to express themselves clearly and assertively. Developing strong communication skills is an investment in personal growth, reducing misunderstandings and enhancing mutual understanding in interactions. Low self-esteem, often developed through early life experiences and shaped by how one is treated by significant figures like parents, is a key factor in the dynamics of violent relationships. Those who receive love and positive reinforcement in childhood tend to develop higher self-esteem, while negative treatment can lead to lower self-worth. Importantly, self-esteem is not fixed; it can be strengthened through improved communication skills and the achievement of personal goals, fostering a healthier sense of self (Kuchinkas, 2009)

### ***Why use effective communication***

The process of selecting the right person to have an intimate relationship with and to understand each other's needs relies on good communication. There is usually a swift judgement of whether or not someone listens or cares based on a serious response; otherwise, rejection is often an indicator that the couple is incompatible either in terms of values or intentions. Besides, the openly stated needs, whether in a new or old relationship, make it easy for a partner to react appropriately, thereby reducing miscommunication and increasing relational satisfaction (Kuchinkas, 2009).

### ***When to use effective communication***

For anxious people, constructive communication becomes an alternative to protest behaviours. Instead of the impulsive expression of distress or reaction to a partner's action or inaction, anxious people should stop themselves for a moment, figure out what their core need is, and calmly and clearly communicate without dramatising the situation. It is good to wait until fully calm, even for a day or two.

For an avoidant attachment style, the desire to pull away may be a cue to communicate effectively. An avoidant person can explain their need for space and suggest compromises that take into account the needs of their partner. This way, they can ensure that they get the emotional breathing room they need without straining the relationship unnecessarily (Levine and Heller, 2010).

One of the book's core messages is that attachment security is a collaborative effort. Even secure individuals may benefit from reassurance and consistent displays of affection, which strengthen their attachment system's positive response. This perspective aligns with the book's broader argument that attachment security is an adaptive trait but one that requires ongoing nurturing and support.

## **Conclusion**

The book provides various tests and questionnaires to test what 'yours' and 'your partners' attachment style is, which leaves the reader with much practical clarity over things explained in the book. The readability of the book is appreciable. The flow the authors created throughout the topics discussed and the connection that has been created by the authors with the readers is marvellous. By highlighting the fluidity of attachment styles, the authors encourage a more compassionate view of oneself and others. The book's emphasis on how secure individuals may transition to insecure attachment styles underscores the importance of relational dynamics and life experiences, which continuously shape pupils attachment systems.

Attached demystifies psychological concepts, which have become a complex bundle, with the help of research, practical advice and examples that relate to day-to-day struggles in relationship. By focusing on the interplay between upbringing, biology and adult relationships, Levine and Heller explain how attachment styles develop and how to raise healthier, more secure attachment. Whatever kind of attachment one may have, this book gives really precious insights into building the sort of relationships that fulfil and endure, making it one of the most valuable resources of all for anyone wanting to build their emotional security.

## Declarations

**Conflicts of interest:** The author has no conflicts of interest.

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