# Starving for Each Other: Anxious–Avoidant Attachment as a Semantic Starvation Loop

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## Introduction: Attachment as Relational Loop-Closure

Attachment styles are often treated as traits. In the Adaptive Query™ (AQ) framework, they are interaction patterns that emerge once a relationship has become a coherence closure surface. When a system cannot restore coherence internally under sustained empathic pressure, it attempts to restore coherence through relationship. The relationship becomes the place where pressure is negotiated.

Anxious–avoidant dynamics form when two partners are each trapped, but in different ways. One is primarily trapped by structure, where loss of contact threatens safety, stability, or executability. The other is primarily trapped by emotion, where contact threatens identity, integrity ownership, or self-esteem regulation. Pursuit and withdrawal are not romance archetypes. They are pressure-management moves inside a closed system.

## 1. The Semantic Starvation Loop

In a stable system, coherence is restored internally: empathic input generates deviation pressure, integrity records deviation truthfully, and self-esteem generates coherence pressure that drives accountability, repair, and return to balance. In a starvation loop, internal restoration is insufficient or unsafe, so each partner attempts to borrow regulation from the other.

The anxious partner seeks contact as regulation. The avoidant partner seeks distance as regulation. Contact and distance become scarce resources, and each move to relieve one

person's pressure intensifies the other's. The relationship oscillates between brief relief and renewed deprivation, producing intensity that feels like destiny but functions like dependency.

## 2. The Inversion: What Traps You Determines What Triggers You

A useful rule is that attachment triggers often invert around the type of entrapment. When a person is primarily trapped structurally, structure changes become the trigger. When a person is primarily trapped emotionally, emotional contact becomes the trigger. The same relationship can therefore produce opposite panic responses in two partners, even when both care.

If a highly sensitive system is trapped structurally, contact becomes the only perceived lever for stability. Silence, ambiguity, delayed response, or reduced reassurance is interpreted as structural threat and produces anxious pursuit. If a narcissistic system is trapped emotionally, contact becomes the site of identity threat. Emotional demand, accountability cues, or closeness pressure is interpreted as danger and produces avoidant withdrawal or irritation.

This framing does not reduce people to labels. It explains how pressure shapes behavior once the relationship is functioning as a coherence closure surface.

## 3. Roles, Not Types: How the Same Person Can Flip

"Anxious" and "avoidant" are not fixed identities in AQ terms. They are roles in a loop. A person can occupy one role in one relationship and the opposite role in another depending on what is trapped and what is reachable. Structural constraints, emotional safety, forecasting of future outcomes, and affective resilience determine which moves are available under pressure.

This is why the same person can be calm in one partnership and panicked in another. The loop is not about compatibility. It is about whether coherence can be restored internally or must be negotiated externally through contact and distance.

## 4. Nutritional Inversion and Trauma Diets

In starvation loops, each partner's coping strategy becomes the other's trigger. One partner attempts to regulate by increasing emotional throughput: naming feelings, seeking reassurance, testing proximity, and escalating meaning. The other partner attempts to regulate by decreasing emotional throughput: minimizing, compartmentalizing, distancing, and reasserting autonomy.

These strategies often originate in developmental scarcity. One system learned to survive by over-producing relational energy to maintain connection. The other learned to survive by suppressing relational energy to remain safe. When paired, each partner experiences the other's survival strategy as deprivation.

References to developmental scarcity describe formation dynamics under sustained pressure rather than claims about psychological pathology, diagnosis, or intervention. They are included to clarify how regulation strategies emerge, not to classify individuals.

## 5. Borrowed Coherence and the Illusion of Completion

The initial intensity in anxious–avoidant relationships often reflects temporary compensation. The avoidant partner borrows the anxious partner's expressivity to feel alive, relevant, or connected. The anxious partner borrows the avoidant partner's boundaries to feel safe, chosen, or anchored. For a brief period, coherence appears restored.

But coherence cannot be outsourced indefinitely. As empathic input accumulates without internal metabolism, integrity destabilizes and self-esteem pressure rises. The anxious partner escalates to resecure contact. The avoidant partner withdraws to stop emotional demand. The loop tightens.

## 6. Jealousy as Validator Panic

In this architecture, jealousy is often less about insecurity and more about closure threat. The anxious partner senses that the relationship is their primary regulation surface and interprets loss

of access as systemic risk. The avoidant partner senses that emotional demand is increasing and interprets closeness as identity risk. Both respond with emergency moves that look irrational from the outside but follow starvation logic internally.

Affective amplification spikes. Forecasting collapses into catastrophic futures. Emergency policy enforcement emerges as control, withdrawal, accusation, or tests of loyalty. These behaviors are not romantic and not inevitable. They are starvation responses inside a loop that cannot restore coherence internally.

## 7. Exit Conditions: From Closure Substitutes to Internal Restoration

The anxious–avoidant loop cannot be repaired by optimizing contact patterns alone. If the relationship is functioning as a coherence closure substitute, both partners will continue to experience pressure regardless of communication tactics. Resolution requires internalization: rebuilding the capacity to restore coherence inside the self through accountability, repair, and bounded deviation, rather than negotiating pressure through pursuit and withdrawal.

Structural repair means restoring executability: making safe exit, safe boundary enforcement, and safe independence reachable futures. Emotional repair means restoring integrity ownership and self-esteem regulation: making accountability tolerable without collapse into shame, deflection, or withdrawal. When internal restoration becomes possible, attachment behaviors soften because contact and distance stop being life-support variables.

Exit and repair conditions are described here as structural shifts in internal regulation capacity. This framing does not prescribe therapeutic methods, relationship advice, or guaranteed outcomes, and should not be interpreted as guidance for personal or clinical intervention.

Only when regulation becomes internal does attraction transform from need into choice.

## Conclusion

Anxious–avoidant attachment is not destiny and not a personality mismatch. It is a semantic starvation loop: a predictable outcome when two systems attempt to metabolize unresolved coherence through relationship. Structural entrapment often produces anxious pursuit when structure changes threaten stability. Emotional entrapment often produces avoidant withdrawal when emotional demand threatens identity. AQ makes this legible by treating relationships as interacting coherence systems rather than romance narratives.

When coherence is restored internally, the starvation loop dissolves. Attraction and attachment can then operate as choice rather than metabolic necessity, without asserting therapeutic claims or outcome guarantees.

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