

## Abstract

An avoidant attachment (AA) style affects the individual and their relationships; it is prevalent in the population (Levine and Heller, 2010). Yet existing literature on 'earned secure attachment' (ESA) and fostering security in therapy is sparse, particularly from the client's perspective. This study aimed to provide a voice to the under researched avoidant client, recording experiences of integrative psychotherapy and discovering if, and how, security was fostered. The goal was to provide illuminating and unique data that could add to the field of psychotherapy.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data from four trainee/qualified integrative psychotherapists who related to having an AA. The research was undertaken using the heuristic method, allowing an overarching framework and thorough data analysis. To understand the experience of psychotherapy and security, one must comprehend how the avoidant personality manifests. While investigating these through a series of steps, including a creative synthesis of the findings, the following themes/*subthemes* emerged:

The avoidant client – *fear and sequestering the self*

Experiences of integrative psychotherapy – *challenging the self*

Experiences of fostering security – *meeting psychological needs and the reticence remains*

The results are useful for therapists, training institutions and those wishing to understand more about AA. They are discussed in relation to previous literature and the potential for further research to advance knowledge in this area.